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Field notes

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Water Governance Actors

Les acteurs de l'eau

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Lesedi : Sesotho word meaning "knowledge"

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Focus

Water Governance Actors in Southern Africa

Les acteurs de l'eau en Afrique australe

Coordinated by Nicolas Verhaeghe and Paul-Malo Winsback

La parution de ce dossier spécial de Lesedi *– qui rassemble des articles tirés de missions de terrain dont plusieurs ont été soutenues par l'IFAS-Recherche – est une excellente occasion d'élargir la focale, et de mettre en valeur la variété et la complémentarité des recherches menées en Afrique australe sur les thématiques liées à l'eau.*

L'IFAS-Recherche a donc demandé, en guise d'avant-propos, à deux chercheurs français du CIRAD (Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement), tous deux actuellement en poste à l'université de Pretoria, de présenter les centres de recherche auxquels ils sont rattachés, le Centre for Environmental Economics and Policy in Africa *et le* Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation. *Le foisonnement des travaux menés dans ces deux instituts démontre combien la question de l'eau est cruciale en Afrique australe, et à quel point elle cristallise toute une série de questions de nature économique, politique, sociale, anthropologique, etc. que les chercheurs de tous horizons n'ont pas fini d'épuiser.*

Gouverner la ressource en eau en Afrique australe

Magalie Bourblanc, Damien Jourdain

Magalie Bourblanc

Politiste de formation, chercheuse au CIRAD rattachée à l'UMR G-Eau (université de Montpellier), Magalie Bourblanc est actuellement extraordinary lecturer *à l'université de Pretoria, où elle mène ses recherches sur les politiques de l'eau en Afrique australe au sein de deux centres, le* Centre for Environmental Economics and Policy in Africa *CEEPA et GovInn.*

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La gouvernance de la ressource en eau est une des thématiques phares du *Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation* (GovInn) et du *Centre for Environmental Economics and Policy in Africa* (CEEPA), deux centres de recherche de l'université de Pretoria. Innover avec les acteurs africains sur la gouvernance et l'économie des ressources naturelles, en particulier l'eau, et favoriser l'intérêt des décideurs dans ce domaine, telles sont les missions de ces deux centres de recherche.

Dans le domaine de l'eau, leurs travaux sont de nature diverse. Il existe d'abord en leur sein une série de travaux qui étudient la dimension politique du nexus eau-société. Ces travaux considèrent la problématique de l'eau comme un point d'observation privilégié de la dynamique de recomposition et de transformations de la société sud-africaine dans un contexte post-Apartheid. En effet, on parle beaucoup des crispations autour du foncier en Afrique du Sud et de l'infâme « héritage de l'Apartheid » : des discriminations raciales qui étaient loin de n'être que sociales et qui au fil du temps ont fini par s'inscrire jusque dans les paysages. Les chercheurs de GovInn considèrent que pour bien saisir les questions de justice spatiale, il est essentiel de remettre au centre de l'analyse la problématique hydrique, aux côtés des débats sur le foncier, dans la mesure où l'accès à l'eau représente un marqueur majeur des injustices sociales en Afrique du Sud en particulier, mais pas uniquement.

Au moment de la transition démocratique en 1994, le premier ministre de l'Eau, Kader Asmal, l'avait bien compris. Il voulait faire de l'accès à l'eau une des batailles

les plus importantes pour lutter contre les inégalités qui rongeaient la société sud-africaine. Les espoirs autour d'une réforme de la loi sur l'eau étaient alors immenses : « *With water we will wash away the past* », comme l'a magnifiquement écrit la poétesse sud-africaine Antjie Krog, en préambule de la future loi de réforme sur l'eau en Afrique du Sud (*White Paper on a NationalWater Policy for South Africa*, 1997). Adoptant une perspective de *Political ecology,* les travaux des chercheurs de GovInn interrogent cette promesse, que ce soit au niveau de l'accès à l'eau potable gratuite pour les plus démunis ou de l'accès à l'eau pour l'irrigation pour les nouveaux entrants du secteur agricole. Ils dressent souvent un bilan très critique des résultats obtenus jusqu'à présent, constatant que, plus de vingt ans après l'adoption de la loi de réforme sur l'eau, la bataille pour le redressement des inégalités liées à l'eau est loin d'avoir été remportée (Bourblanc and Blanchon, 2017; 2019).

Il existe ensuite, au sein du CEEPA, une série de travaux qui étudient la dimension économique de la gouvernance de l'eau et des écosystèmes aquatiques comme les bas-fonds. Ces études sont centrées sur les préférences des utilisateurs vis-à-vis de changements institutionnels ou de changements d'instruments économiques. Compte tenu de la diversité des parties prenantes qui bénéficient directement ou indirectement des services écosystémiques liés à l'eau, les problèmes liés à l'utilisation et le partage de l'eau présentent de nombreuses caractéristiques d'un *problème pernicieux* pour faire référence au terme anglo-saxon de *wicked problem* mis en évidence dans les années 70 par Rittel and Webber (1973). Dans ce cadre, des outils d'enquêtes adaptés (par exemple, méthode Q, expérience de choix, économie expérimentale) visent à mieux identifier la diversité des perspectives et leurs déterminants. Cette approche permet d'avoir une cartographie assez précise des perceptions et des points de vue, qui permet une meilleure préparation des ateliers participatifs et des échanges avec les travaux des autres disciplines.

Favoriser la participation au processus de décision est au cœur du projet de GovInn et de son analyse de la gouvernance. Le terme de « gouvernance » souligne la complexité des processus décisionnels dans les affaires politiques et économiques contemporaines. Il met l'accent sur la difficulté, aujourd'hui, à raisonner à partir de recettes préétablies dictées par des experts avisés, travaillant à résoudre un problème bien identifié avec pour objectif le bien commun. Les dynamiques des ressources naturelles sont complexes, leur gestion implique et affecte de nombreux acteurs ayant chacun des informations partielles et des visions divergentes sur les objectifs et les problèmes à gérer (DeFries and Nagendra, 2017). Il met donc en exergue l'idée que les gouvernements ne peuvent plus gouverner seuls : ils doivent partager un peu de leur pouvoir de décision avec d'autres entités, des organisations non gouvernementales aux institutions régionales et aux entreprises privées.

Prendre en compte un nombre croissant d'acteurs, formels comme informels, de la gestion de l'eau est aussi au centre des préoccupations des différents textes de ce numéro collectif. Enfin, les différentes contributions de ce numéro de *Lesedi* ont le mérite d'insister sur la persistance des relations asymétriques qui caractérisent les interactions entre ces différents acteurs et organisations au-delà de la croyance dans l'horizontalité de l'exercice du pouvoir qui, pour certains, accompagne encore trop souvent le recours au cadre d'analyse de la gouvernance.

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Water Governance Actors in Southern Africa
Field Surveys, Between Interdisciplinarity and Contemporary Issues

Nicolas Verhaeghe, Paul-Malo Winsback

In this issue of *Lesedi*, which reflects on the agents of freshwater governance in Southern Africa, water resources are the subject of rich interactions on account of the great social, institutional, geographic as well as climatic diversity of the subcontinent. While it is marked by a highly variable raininess, the region shares a situation of water stress, i.e. a general tendency to freshwater scarcity (Msangi 2014)[1]. Faced with these *a priori* natural conditions, the political response of the countries of the region is paradoxically caught between what appears to be good regional co-operation as regards water governance, and the persistent difficulties experienced by the populations in accessing water (Swatuk 2017).

Yet, this might not necessarily be a contradiction but, rather, the product of an illusion of unicity and institutional coherence. Indeed, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the water environment of which has been the subject of a study by Agathe Maupin (2013), gathers together the entire subcontinent under a common label hiding a diversity of situations. The processes at play have, in fact, already been the subject of many studies on the formal structures that conceive and circulate water management paradigms and models (Msangi 2014), as well as on emergent engineering innovations in this regard (Bourblanc 2015). Often introduced as being virtuous by certain international institutions, Southern Africa has also given rise to research works on the deployment of global policies, and on their local and regional translations (Mehta, Derman, and Manzungu 2016; 2017).

As highlighted by Larry Swatuk (2002; 2005; 2017), water governance in Southern Africa brings actors with different knowledge, abilities and degrees of recognition to confront one another, actors that constantly negotiate and renegotiate their role and their right to water. Their interactions, against a background of complex and interdependent problems, are part of governance networks involving various agents (Meissner and Jacobs 2016). To date, institutional structures organised at the national or transnational level, on the scale of the catchment area[2], work on the assumption that "stakeholders" are able to voice their opinions adequately, within formal frameworks where main decisions are taken on water allowance, usage and management in the subregion (Merrey *et al.* 2017). Yet, these decisions are imbued with the political, normative, ethical and subjective considerations of actors that are subjected to specific forces and found in unusual contexts.

In this complex configuration, the so-called "civil society" structures and institutions outside the continent play a role which is far from insignificant. In Southern Africa, regional and international organisations with federative roles, such as the Global Water Partnership Southern Africa or Global Environment Facility, have a major influence on national NGOs and other hybrid, public-private type (semi-public) structures. Likewise, sponsors, and those from European Union countries in particular, have played and continue to play a crucial role in concluding agreements on freshwater management, as well as in financing projects and their implementation (Merrey *et al.* 2017). This is the case of SADC subsidiary

1. On the debates around water stress and water security, see Cook and Bakker (2012).
2. A water catchment area or drainage basin is a geographic unit that gathers a watercourse and its tributaries, and is considered as a coherent whole.

institution *WaterNet* which offers regional water management training programmes. Its annual symposium, which gives rise to a publication in the journal *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth*, shows a certain level of dynamism which is rooted in the transnational networks that are developed and maintained, among others, by several key actors.

Behind these networks, institutions and practices are agents that are often forgotten in water studies (Mollinga 2008) – either on account of a technical prism, or because only institutions and their functions are being focussed on. Regional issues are analysed mainly from a geopolitical perspective (Turton *et al.* 2004), which is more interested in formal institutions than in interactions between people. When actors are taken into account, it is more often from the angle of corruption (Earle 2007), i.e. from an essentially moral or legal perspective (Blundo, Olivier de Sardan 2006). These studies, as a result, aim more at understanding the structuring of interactions between actors, with a view to initiating change and making recommendations. We find for example this normative guideline in David McDonald's research (1997) on the civil servants of the city of Cape Town post-apartheid, and on the continuity these agents have ensured at the end of the Supremacist regime. And although these works are often focussed on official instances, Meissner and Jacobs (2016) recall that, next to State institutions, groups of agents without a public mandate form an additional layer of governance, agents behind events that are sometimes insignificant but which have deep repercussions on water management policies – and this, on different scales (Meissner and Jacobs 2016; Merrey *et al.* 2017). By calling for the more frequent inclusion of these individuals in studies on water governance, researchers can lead the way for a wider scientific dialogue.

It is precisely on the basis of this productive perspective that this issue of *Lesedi* intends to push these agents to the front, whose action is grasped on different scales, those in particular who adapt or put up, on a daily basis, with water usage (Sokile and van Koppen 2004) to domestic as well as economic ends. It will also be a matter of including those who act like street level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980), international "low profile labour" (Lecler, Morival and Bouagga 2018) or "major brokers" (Dezalay and Garth 2002).

Shaped by different approaches, whether methodological, philosophical or discipline-related, the five articles in this issue deal with human interactions with and around fresh water, based on original field research. Their diversity offers a general idea of water studies in the social sciences, mixing and combining various disciplines, from social geography to political science via legal studies, as well as studies conducted by engineers concerned with understanding the effects and consequences of water-related programmes and policies. The proposed surveys are investigations on agents, on the structures that influence them, as well as on the way agents organise these structures and occupy them. They will push to the front various actors and interest groups that influence water governance, within and outside the established institutional scene, allowing us to observe their interactions and strategies. Stemming mainly from doctoral research works, the range of works presented here and the theoretical corpus mobilised to analyse them, shows once more the delicate apprehension of the term "governance", that can sometimes hide power relations behind a democratic illusion of flexibility, or even apolitical attitudes (Hermet 2004). The complexity of this notion shows in the articles, through the multiplicity of categories of actors and their scales of intervention, but also through the diversity of those (e.g. the authors) who study them. Together, these research works call for changing focus and going back to the generally accepted idea, according to which the management of so-called natural objects goes without saying.

The five articles presented here can be divided into two thematic groups. The first group concerns issues developing around water administrators and their practices. Access to water and participation in drinkable water distribution services are indeed regularly studied, on the African continent in particular (Baron and Valette 2020). Starting from field works involving associations of water users, Ngcimezile Mbano-Mwesoa takes an interest in the participation of residents in the rural and peri-urban areas of Malawi, as regards the establishment of water rights. By comparing the running of users' associations in peri-urban and rural environments, she shows that, far from generally accepted ideas, participation is a more tangible reality in rural areas. The place of women in these associations is also questioned. The research of the author is in line with increasingly numerous studies which

associate gender issues with human rights issues but which, despite everything, still remain marginal (van Koppen 2017).

A second article examines access to drinkable water distribution services in the district of Ngamiland, in Botswana. Krasposy Kujinga, Gagoitseope Mmopelwa, Cornelis Vanderpost and Wellington R.L. Masamba question the means and challenges of water governance by municipalities in rural areas, in a country which is regularly showcased as one of the most virtuous countries on the continent (Compagnon and Mokopakgosi 2001). In a voluntarily normative perspective, they assess the consequences and efficiency of water governance.

Finally, these water access programmes are rooted in networks of national and international production, where Southern Africa is often pointed out as being a "good student" (Alba and Bolding 2017). Paul-Malo Winsback has been conducting an ethnographic study of all those who are in charge of developing and spreading these programmes, i.e. agents of the water sector from the SADC, whose actions were acknowledged during one of their meetings held in May 2018, in Windhoek. Through the observation and historicisation of their sociability, Winsback studies how regional structures are spread and consolidated. He observes the practices of what appears at first sight to be a disparate collective of agents with different statuses, who forms an original government for water affairs in Southern Africa.

The second group of articles explores issues and arrangements around access to water resources from watercourses, for residents in rural and semi-rural areas. Focused essentially on agricultural uses and irrigation needs, two of the articles take an interest in the social and environmental transformations entailed by the distance separating users from watercourses, on account of major engineering (construction of a dam) and conservation (development of a national park) projects. Despite their large spatial coverage, and the manifest asymmetry between public authorities and users as regards power and capacity for negotiation, there is room for manoeuvre in the interstices of governance.

By focusing on a historical perspective as regards the construction of the Massingir Dam from 1972 to 1983, Paulo Jose analyses the consequences of the development programmes of the Frelimo party, which at the time had just come to power in Mozambique. By conducting interviews and observations on site, Jose notes the damage caused by colonial water engineering projects, and their effects on the populations which were caught between being (re)appropriated by the Frelimist State, and fighting with the traditional authorities.

Nicolas Verhaeghe, based on extracts from field visits and interviews, observes the macro and micro dynamics of access to water at the Sabie River, in an area where the river constitutes a border between a protected area, and the inhabited and cultivated areas of a former Bantustan. From the two South African riverbanks, the article examines the point of view of the different users (park administrators, services responsible for maintaining animal enclosures, farmers and residents) so as to understand the interests of all parties, and examines the methods used by residents and farmers to physically access the river. Both articles question the effects of national spatial transformation policies, as well as the changes in the life of the residents and farmers who were displaced for various reasons, and as such highlight the ruptures and historical continuities that have been underlying the region for the past fifty years.

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Les acteurs de l'eau en Afrique australe
Enquêtes de terrain, entre interdisciplinarité et enjeux contemporains

Nicolas Verhaeghe, Paul-Malo Winsback

Ce numéro de *Lesedi* propose une réflexion sur les agents de la gouvernance des eaux douces en Afrique australe. Les ressources hydriques y font en effet l'objet de riches interactions, du fait de la grande diversité du sous-continent, tant sur le plan social et institutionnel que géographique et climatique. Marquée par la forte variabilité de son régime pluviométrique, la région partage cependant une situation de stress hydrique, c'est-à-dire une tendance générale à la raréfaction de l'eau douce (Msangi 2014)[1]. Confrontée à ces conditions *a priori* naturelles, la réponse politique des pays de la région est prise en tenailles, de façon paradoxale, entre une apparente bonne coopération régionale en matière de gouvernance de la ressource et une difficulté persistante des populations à y accéder (Swatuk 2017).

Cette contradiction n'en est pourtant pas nécessairement une : elle est plutôt le produit d'une illusion d'unicité et de cohérence institutionnelle. La SADC (Communauté de développement d'Afrique australe), dont le milieu hydrique a notamment été étudié par Agathe Maupin (2013), rassemble en effet l'ensemble du sous-continent derrière une étiquette commune qui cache une diversité de situations. Les processus en jeu ont d'ailleurs déjà fait l'objet de nombreuses études portant sur les structures formelles qui conçoivent et font circuler les paradigmes et les modèles de gestion de l'eau (Msangi 2014), ainsi que sur les innovations en matière d'ingénierie qui ont émergé au sein cet espace (Bourblanc 2015). Souvent présentée comme vertueuse par certaines institutions internationales, l'Afrique australe a aussi donné lieu à des recherches sur le déploiement de politiques globales, et sur leurs traductions locales et régionales (Mehta, Derman, et Manzungu 2016 ; 2017).

Comme le souligne Larry Swatuk (2002 ; 2005 ; 2017), la gouvernance de l'eau en Afrique australe met aux prises des acteurs aux connaissances, aux capacités et au degré de reconnaissance différents, qui négocient et renégocient constamment leur rôle et leurs droits à l'eau. Leurs interactions, sur fond de problématiques complexes et interdépendantes, s'inscrivent dans des réseaux de gouvernance impliquant des agents variés (Meissner et Jacobs 2016). À ce jour, les structures institutionnelles organisées au niveau national ou transnational, à l'échelle du bassin versant[2], partent du postulat que les « parties prenantes » sont en mesure de faire entendre leur voix de façon adéquate, au sein de cadres formels où sont prises les principales décisions sur l'allocation de l'eau, son utilisation et sa gestion dans la sous-région (Merrey *et al*. 2017). Pourtant, ces décisions sont imprégnées des considérations politiques, normatives, éthiques et subjectives des acteurs, insérés dans des constellations de forces particulières et dans des contextes singuliers.

Dans cette configuration complexe, les structures dites « de société civile » et les institutions extérieures au continent jouent un rôle qui est loin d'être anodin. En Afrique australe, des organisations régionales et mondiales au rôle fédérateur, comme le *Global Water Partnership Southern Africa* ou le *Global Environment* Facility, ont ainsi une influence majeure auprès d'ONG nationales et autres structures hybrides de type public-privé

1. Sur les débats autour du stress hydrique et de la sécurité en eau, voir (Cook et Bakker 2012).
2. Le bassin versant ou bassin hydrographique est une unité géographique qui réunit un cours d'eau et ses affluents, considérés comme un tout cohérent.

(parapubliques). De la même manière, les bailleurs de fonds, et notamment ceux issus des pays de l'Union européenne, ont joué et continuent de jouer un rôle crucial dans la conclusion d'accords sur la gestion des eaux douces, ainsi que dans le financement de projets et leur mise en œuvre (Merrey *et al.* 2017). C'est par exemple le cas du programme *WaterNet* de la SADC (Communauté de développement d'Afrique australe) qui propose des formations sur l'eau dans une démarche régionale. Son symposium annuel, qui donne lieu à publication dans la revue *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth*, témoigne d'un dynamisme certain, ancré dans des réseaux transnationaux construits et maintenus, entre autres, par plusieurs acteurs-clés.

Derrière ces réseaux, institutions et pratiques, les agents qui les constituent sont souvent les oubliés des *water studies* (Mollinga 2008) – soit du fait d'un prisme technicien, soit en raison d'une focale centrée sur les seules institutions et leurs fonctions. Les jeux régionaux sont principalement analysés sous un angle géopolitique (Turton *et al.* 2004), qui investit davantage les institutions formelles que les interactions entre personnes. Lorsque les acteurs sont pris en compte, c'est le plus souvent dans l'angle de la corruption (Earle 2007), c'est-à-dire dans une perspective essentiellement morale ou juridique (Blundo, Olivier de Sardan 2006). Ces études visent par conséquent davantage à comprendre la structuration des interactions entre acteurs dans l'optique de conduire le changement et de produire des recommandations. On retrouve par exemple ce cadrage normatif dans la recherche de David McDonald (1997) sur les fonctionnaires de la ville du Cap après l'apartheid, et sur la continuité que ces agents ont assuré à l'issue de la chute du régime suprématiste. Et bien que les travaux évoqués soient souvent centrés sur les instances officielles, Meissner et Jacobs (2016) rappellent qu'à côté des institutions étatiques, des groupes d'agents sans mandat public forment une couche de gouvernance supplémentaire, à l'origine d'événements parfois anodins mais dont les implications sont profondes dans les politiques de l'eau – et ce, à différentes échelles (Meissner et Jacobs 2016 ; Merrey *et al.* 2017). En appelant à inclure davantage ces individus dans les études sur la gouvernance de l'eau, ces chercheurs et chercheuses ouvrent ainsi la voie à un dialogue scientifique étendu.

C'est précisément à partir de cet angle fertile que le présent dossier de *Lesedi* propose de mettre en lumière ces agents dont l'action est saisie à différentes échelles, et notamment ceux qui accommodent ou s'accommodent, au quotidien, des usages de l'eau (Sokile et van Koppen 2004) – tant à fins domestiques qu'économiques. Il s'agira aussi d'intégrer ceux qui agissent en *street level bureaucrats* (Lipsky 1980), en « petites mains » de l'international (Lecler, Morival et Bouagga 2018) ou en « grands courtiers » (Dezalay et Garth 2002).

Façonnées par des approches différentes, tant disciplinaires, méthodologiques que philosophiques, les cinq contributions du numéro traitent des interactions humaines avec et autour de l'eau douce, à partir de recherches de terrain originales. Leur diversité offre un aperçu des études hydriques en sciences sociales, mêlant et combinant les champs disciplinaires, de la géographie sociale à la science politique, en passant par le droit, ainsi que des études menées par des ingénieurs soucieux de comprendre les effets et les conséquences des programmes et des politiques de l'eau. Les enquêtes proposées sont autant d'investigations sur les agents, les structures qui les influent, la façon avec laquelle ils les structurent et les habitent. Ainsi pourront-elles mettre en lumière divers acteurs et groupes d'intérêts qui influencent la gouvernance de l'eau au sein et en dehors de l'échiquier institutionnel établi, nous invitant à observer leurs interactions et leurs stratégies. Majoritairement issu de recherches doctorales, l'éventail des travaux présentés ici et des corpus théoriques mobilisés pour les analyser démontre, une fois encore, la délicate appréhension du terme de « gouvernance », qui peut parfois occulter des rapports de pouvoir derrière une illusion démocratique de flexibilité, voire d'apolitisme (Hermet 2004). La complexité de cette notion transparaît dans les contributions, à travers la multiplicité des catégories d'acteurs et de leurs échelles d'intervention, mais également au regard de la diversité des personnes qui les étudient (les contributeurs). Ensemble, ces travaux invitent à décentrer le regard et reviennent sur l'idée reçue selon laquelle la gestion d'objets dits naturels irait de soi.

Les cinq articles peuvent être regroupés en deux grands axes. Tout d'abord se pose la question des enjeux

qui se nouent autour des gestionnaires de l'eau, et autour de leurs pratiques. L'accès à l'eau et la participation aux services de distribution d'eau potable sont en effet des objets régulièrement étudiés, et particulièrement sur le continent africain (Baron et Valette 2020). Partant de travaux de terrain auprès d'associations d'usagers d'eau, Ngcimezile Mbano-Mwesoa s'intéresse à la participation des habitants, au Malawi, en zones rurales et périurbaines, dans la mise en place de droits à l'eau. Par un comparatif entre le fonctionnement des associations d'usagers en milieu périurbain et rural, elle démontre que, loin des idées reçues, la participation est une réalité plus tangible dans les campagnes. La place des femmes dans ces associations est également interrogée. L'auteure s'inscrit dans la lignée des études, de plus en plus nombreuses, qui associent les questions de genre à celles des droits humains, mais qui demeurent malgré tout encore marginales (van Koppen 2017).

Une deuxième contribution propose d'examiner l'accès aux services de distribution d'eau potable à partir du district de Ngamiland au Botswana. Krasposy Kujinga, Gagoitseope Mmopelwa, Cornelis Vanderpost et Wellington R.L. Masamba y interrogent les ressorts et les défis de la gouvernance municipale de l'eau en zone rurale, dans un pays régulièrement présenté comme l'un des plus vertueux du continent (Compagnon et Mokopakgosi 2001). Dans une perspective volontairement normative, ils en évaluent la portée et l'effectivité.

Enfin, ces programmes d'accès à l'eau sont ancrés dans des réseaux de production nationaux et internationaux, où l'Afrique australe est souvent désignée comme une « bonne élève » (Alba et Bolding 2017). Paul-Malo Winsback réalise quant à lui une ethnographie de celles et ceux qui sont en charge de développer et de diffuser ces programmes, les agents du secteur de l'eau de la SADC, dont l'action est saisie à la faveur de l'une de leurs rencontres, en mai 2018, à Windhoek. Par l'observation et l'historicisation de leur sociabilité, il étudie les ressorts de diffusion et de stabilisation des structures régionales. Il y observe les pratiques d'un collectif *a priori* disparate d'agents aux statuts différents, qui forme un ordre original de gouvernement de l'eau au sud du continent.

Dans un deuxième axe, le numéro explore les enjeux et les arrangements autour de l'accès aux ressources hydriques des cours d'eau, en zone rurale et semi-rurale, pour les riverains. Centrées essentiellement sur les usages agricoles et les besoins pour l'irrigation, les deux contributions s'intéressent aux transformations sociales et environnementales qu'implique l'éloignement des usagers vis-à-vis des cours d'eau, du fait des grands projets d'exploitation (construction d'un barrage) et de conservation (développement d'un parc national). Malgré leur forte emprise spatiale et l'asymétrie évidente entre autorités publiques et usagers en matière de pouvoir et de capacités de négociation, il existe des marges de manœuvre dans des interstices de la gouvernance.

En se centrant dans une perspective historique sur la construction du barrage de Massingir dans la décennie 1972-1983, Paulo Jose propose ainsi une analyse des conséquences des programmes de développement du Frelimo, alors fraîchement arrivé au pouvoir au Mozambique. Par des entretiens et des observations sur site, il constate les dégâts des projets coloniaux d'ingénierie hydrique et leurs effets sur les populations, prises entre (ré)appropriation par le parti-État frélimiste et lutte avec les autorités traditionnelles.

De son côté, Nicolas Verhaeghe propose, à partir d'extraits de visites de terrain et d'entretiens, d'observer les macro et micro-dynamiques de l'accès à l'eau de la *Sabie river*, dans un espace où la rivière constitue une frontière entre une aire protégée et les zones habitées et cultivées d'un ancien bantoustan. Depuis les deux rives sud-africaines de la rivière, l'article se place du point de vue des différents usagers (gestionnaires du parc, services responsables du maintien de la clôture vétérinaire, cultivateurs et habitants riverains) pour saisir les intérêts des uns et des autres, et les modes d'accès physique à la rivière des habitants et cultivateurs. Ces deux contributions interrogent les effets des politiques nationales de transformations spatiales, et les changements de la vie des habitants et des cultivateurs déplacés pour des raisons diverses et soulignent ainsi les ruptures et les continuités historiques qui parcourent la région depuis un demi-siècle.

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Realising the Human Right to Water in Malawi

Power Balance and Women's Participation in Water User Associations

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Abstract

Lack of universal access to water is one of the fundamental failures of development in the 21st century. Women not only disproportionately bear the burden of lack of safe water, but also have the least opportunity to take part in decisions regarding water services. This is a manifestation of the global water crisis caused by unequal relations of power, poverty and inequality related to gender, geographical location, class and race. Those who lack power find themselves at the peripheral of advantage from governance of water services. This paper argues that the iconic slogan 'water is life' must be understood in both a biological and social sense. The social sense entails participatory living of citizens as equals in a community with others. The human right to water guarantees such living by recognising people as agents who must have power to affect outcomes through genuine participation. With a focus on women in peri-urban and rural Malawi, the paper explores the issues of power, community participation and access to water through grounded research methodology. It interrogates Water User Associations as participatory spaces and finds that these are mainly spaces used as a means to fee collection and not empowerment. It concludes that the recognition and implementation of the human right to water in Malawi will provide an effective way of overcoming the lack of power and the 'tyranny of participation' which characterise water services in these areas.

Keywords: *Agency; community participation; human right to water; water governance; women*

Introduction

The rural and peri-urban areas in Malawi face numerous challenges in accessing water, particularly infrastructural and distributional problems (National Statistics Office, 2014, UNICEF, 2010). For instance, piped water in rural areas is provided through gravity fed schemes (GFS) constructed in the late 1960s and 1970s (Kleemeier, 2000). The communities around the GFS were required to take basic responsibility of care and small repairs while government was responsible for major repairs and provision of spare parts. However, over the years both the government and communities neglected their role of maintaining the GFS. Poor maintenance and rapid population growth far exceeding the envisaged user population resulted in the dilapidation of schemes and / or

non-functioning water points (Kleemeier, 2000). Around 2009 government then took the initiative of rehabilitating GFS and introducing Water User Associations as organisations to ensure ownership and shared responsibilities of operation and maintenance.

Peri-urban areas are characterised mostly by informal settlements, also known as 'squatters' or 'slums' or 'low income settlements' and are 'a site of poverty unnatural hazards and poor public goods delivery' (Cammack, 2012). They commonly face challenges in access to water services and infrastructure, partly attributed to the high rate of urbanisation resulting in high density and the haphazard layout and/or geographical and environmental conditions. These conditions pose practical challenges for planning and the establishment of services or infrastructure. Further, a large percent of the urban poor in these settlements cannot afford a private water connection and hence the main water supply system is through communal kiosks (Zeleza-Manda, 2009). This system, like in the rural areas, also faced a management crisis. Peri-urban areas water supply is provided by the Water Board, a utility company that turned off water supply to the communal water kiosks in most peri-urban areas due to huge unpaid water bills (WaterAid, 2008). Community water committees tasked to collect revenues were captured by political zealots who used the revenues for private or political interests and not payment of water bills (Zeleza-Manda, 2009).

The significance of water for human beings across the world can be summarised in the phrase 'water is life'. This iconic phrase is ordinarily interpreted to mean that water is necessary for biological survival, growth and flourishing (*Mazibuko v City of Johannesburg* [2009]). Indeed, it is. Water is a critical resource for human survival, health, growth and development. Furthermore, women not only disproportionately bear the burden of lack of safe water but also have the least opportunity to take part in decisions regarding water services (Hellum, Kameri-Mbote & Van Koppen 2015). This is a manifestation of the global water crisis caused by unequal relations of power, poverty and inequality related to gender, geographical location, class and race (UNDP 2006). Those who lack power find themselves at the peripheral of advantage from governance of water services. This suggests that the iconic phrase 'water is life' also has a broader meaning which is not ordinarily highlighted. Water is indispensable for establishing communities and leading a communal life worthy of human dignity and human well-being. As a basic social or public good, water is life to, or the lifeblood of, every democratic political community. Therefore, water is the basis of 'participatory living'. The struggle for equitable access to water can give life to community through mobilisation and participation, not simply as an instrumental necessity, but as the driving spirit or 'telos' and thus the realisation of the human right to water itself. The human right to water guarantees such living by recognising people as agents who must have power to affect outcomes through genuine participation.

This paper is dedicated to this second meaning of the phrase 'water is life'. With a focus on women in peri-urban and rural Malawi, it explores the issues of power, community participation and access to water through Fraser's and Young's understanding of equality and agency as participation and justice (Fraser, 2009, Young 1990). It interrogates Water User Associations as participatory spaces. Four communities were selected for the study, two in the rural areas and two in the peri-urban areas both representing underserved areas. These sites were chosen so as to contextualise debates around a human right to water that are particularly pertinent when in places where there is no, or only limited, access to water. The sites were also selected because there is differentiated access to water through water points. Moreover, they are also ideal when considering issues of inclusion /exclusion because these are places where women meet and where they are, or are not, involved in decisions within Water User Associations (WUA) and where participatory governance is very relevant[1]. The particular WUAs included in the study are located in Zomba East, Chagwa, Mtandile and

1. Water User Associations (WUAs) have thus been adopted as participatory, bottom-up spaces for communities to influence and contribute to governance of water services. They offer hope as spaces for gaining power and voice for rural and peri-urban areas otherwise excluded from decision making processes and benefits from governance of water services.

Nkolokoti-Kachere, which were chosen because these are among the forerunners in a new community participation approach. Both the rural and peri-urban areas under the study were faced with water services management crisis due to lack of operation and maintenance or unpaid water bills respectively. (See map showing study areas).

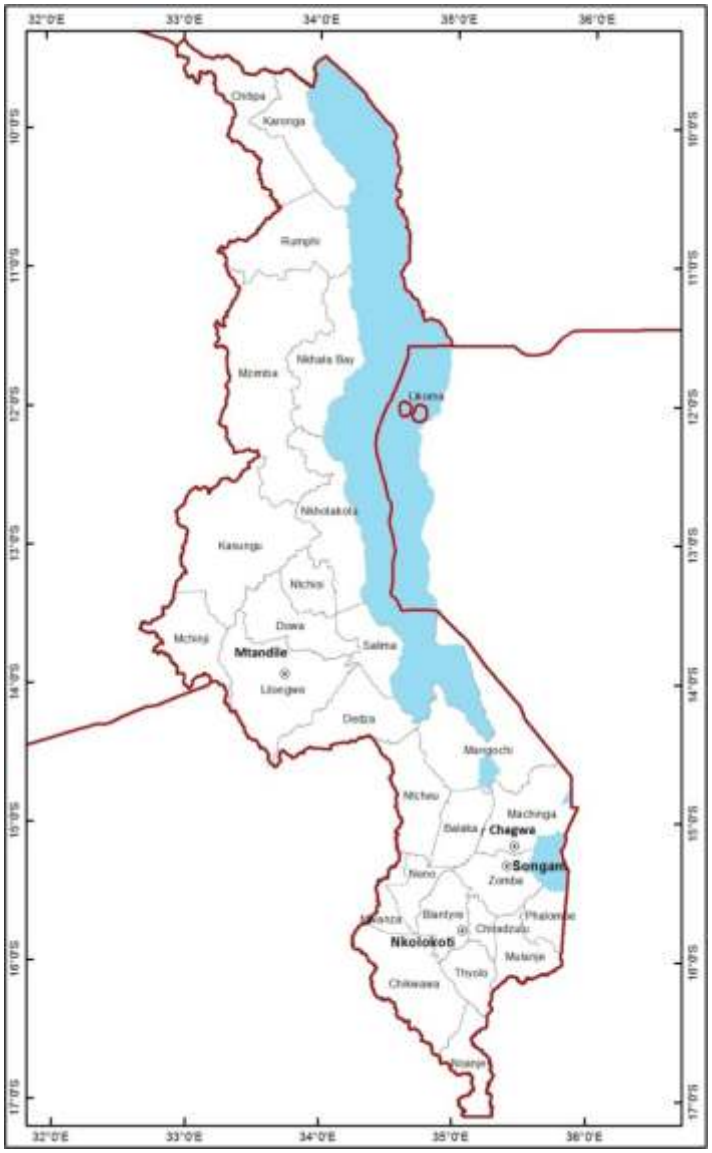

Figure 1: Map showing study area

Normative content: substantive and procedural

The human right to water establishes access to water as a legal entitlement (United Nations' Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, CESCR, 2002). It also entails a right to participate in water governance. This transforms the human right to water from a right aimed at meeting the biological requirements or survival interests of a person, to a right empowering people to become agents and to shape their own lives and the society they live in.

The substantive content of the right, according to the United Nations' Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR, 2002), entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses. Therefore, states have the obligation to realise this right through the establishment of water service systems that guarantee equal opportunity for all to access water (Langford, 2006; Anand, 2007; Fisher, 2009; Mirosa and Harris, 2012). The poor and marginalised must be specifically protected from exclusion of services even when they are unable to pay for services. Although market mechanisms may rely on the payment in the distribution of water, equity is emphasised as the goal at all times (CESCR, 2002, Bluemel, 2004, Langford, 2005). The formulation and implementation of national policies and strategies must ensure participation, human agency and dignity of all those affected by such decisions (CESCR, 2002; Francis and Firestone, 2011; Clark, 2012). However, the full realisation of this right is subject to available resources; hence it is accepted that it will take a long time to fully realise or achieve this right.

The procedural component of the right to water is concerned with the designing and implementation process accompanying the right to have access to safe water for domestic purposes. The participatory right to water is part of the minimum essential element of the human right to water. It is thus immediately binding on State parties and not subject to progressive realisation (CESCR, 2002). The human right to water has established that the process within which the State crafts strategies, policies and laws to ensure the right standards and norms to meet the goal of universal access, must be undertaken in collaboration with people. It particularly requires that poor, disadvantaged and marginalised groups shall/must be given an equal opportunity to take part and influence such processes. Hence within the human right to water is included a right to participate specifically (Francis and Firestone, 2011, Clark, 2012, Robina, 2014). The CESCR

specifically advances a participatory right to water in line with the primacy of equity in the struggle to secure access to water. It should be highlighted that the CESCR (2002) identifies women particularly as requiring special attention in accessing participatory processes and their needs to be reflected in outcomes.

However, there are systemic obstacles that prevent women to participate on an equal basis with others. To ensure equality in participation their disadvantage must be redressed (Young, 1990; Fraser, 2009; Fredman, 2013). Redress will include dealing with deprivation and exploitation through redistribution of resources and configuration of social rules and social relations as well as individual's self-conception and skills (Young, 1990; Fraser, 2000). Stigma, stereotyping, humiliation and violence on grounds of gender must also be addressed to achieve parity (Fredman, 2013). Farha (2008) states that substantive equality does not require that women conform to male norms, but rather that the differences shall be respected and accommodated. States have an obligation to identifying factors that impede people from accessing opportunities with others to build capacity and gain voice, removing such barriers or taking measure to compensate and neutralise their impact (Fraser, 2000, 2007, 2009, 2014; Albertyn, 2002; Bell, 2003; Liebenberg, 2007). Gender inequality, for instance, is contrary to participation as a human right as it hinders equal opportunity to exercise agency or power to make and act on choices (Young, 1996; Fraser, 2000, 2007, 2009; Kabeer, 2005, Farha, 2008; Fredman, 2013). What is involved here is not simply nominal participation but genuine participation, based on the opportunity for disadvantaged and marginalised people to have their needs reflected in policies and laws (Chenwi, 2011).

Collect rich data through grounded research

The field work and qualitative research is employed to clarify the conceptual analysis of the human right to water and especially investigate whether the participatory dimension of the right has had any impact on the role of women on the ground. The inquiry aimed at understanding the nuances of community participation within local water governance and the consideration of opportunities that promote agency especially the agency of women. Qualitative methods that were applied included semi-structured face-to-face interviews, participant observation during community meetings and visits to observe the everyday reality of respondents. It also included secondary data collection in the form of a review of documents such as government and non-governmental organisations reports, which was part of the strategy to get real and credible data, so that reliable data could be used to answer research questions.

The aim of the field work was to collect rich data that would inform the research regarding relations of power, inclusion/exclusion and voice in governance of water services. Charmaz (2006, 2014) states that rich data reveals the participant's views, feelings, intentions, and is able to consider the context and structures within which respondents lived. The fieldwork, therefore, relied on a pragmatic grounded approach that would reflect on how social structures and processes influence participation and agency in local water governance.

For a novice researcher, pragmatic grounded theory is helpful in emphasising the need for rich data. It provides a systematic method for collecting and analysing data in order to explain and predict a phenomenon of interest, especially where a new point of view on a familiar topic emerges (Milliken, 2010). It elicits stories through semi-structured interviews and probing that elaborate on details of the lived realities. The outcome is that spontaneous narratives emerged; in particular a verbal protocol - especially from women respondents - where their concerns, fears, frustration or achievements in the realm of water management, were brought to my attention (Atkinson et al, 2003).

Community participation in Water User Associations

WUAs: bringing people together to solve water problems

The WUAs have emerged as a solution to water problems in rural and peri-urban areas. The success of Kabula Development Association (KDA), established in 1994 by Jan-Jaap Sonke, a member of Parliament in a low

income area, inspired the idea (Government of Malawi 2007). Each site under the study had water problems that necessitated this new intervention. Zomba East Water User Association (ZAEWUA), established in 2009, had only 11 out of 852 taps initially established working (ZAEWUA, 2009). The ZAEWUA is among the first rural WUAs alongside seven others that were set up as government initiatives through the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development (MoIWD) to create participatory spaces and to improve water services in rural areas. The government, through donor aid, began rehabilitating the GFS and providing most materials for extension works. The second rural WUA is Chagwa water cooperative society (CWCS) established in 2006 by WaterAid, an international non-governmental organisation. This was in response to community mobilisation and request for assistance through local government. The request was made due to dilapidated and non-functionality of the GFS which had only 17 taps working out of initial 83 in 1998. It took the community three years to raise the required US$ 2,000 as a contribution before WaterAid undertook rehabilitation works. As a cooperative, CWCS intends to venture into water bottling business where locals can invest, besides managing water services for the area. The business venture has not yet materialised.

Many participants in the rural areas described the WUAs as a site for resolving water provision. In rural areas, there is high reliance on voluntarism and collective action at different levels of WUAs. For instance, as part of the WUAs establishing water points, there is a requirement that communities or villages work together in contributing to the labour to dig trenches for laying pipe work. Rather than paying for the water (on a monthly basis), sweat equity or/and maintenance and operation of the infrastructure is seen as crucial form of participation in WUAs. Awareness campaigns through meetings are carried out, reminding residents how GFS became dilapidated and driving home the message for payment of user fees and contribution through labour in acquiring a facility or helping others acquire a facility. Social networks between villages are activated when acquiring a facility or when a facility is broken. A given community might approach a neighbouring community when mobilising labour for digging trenches necessary for pipe work in order to establish a water facility. There may also be a request by one community for the use of their neighbouring community's facility when their own is in disrepair and until it is once more functional. This reciprocity depends on trust – but trust is broken when the sharing is not reciprocated. In this way, water is a vector of peace and good will between different villagers. Such collective action is altruistic 'as water is a necessity for everyone and helping to achieve this for others is humanity itself' (Focus Group discussion with water users at a water point in ZEWUA area).

An example of a site where trust was brokered is in ZAEWUA, where there are two neighbouring villages who had been rivals for water before the WUAs were established. There was a well in one of the villages but residents did not want to share it with their neighbours because they did not consider that their neighbours had a legitimate claim to the water. When the neighbouring village mobilised labour so that they could benefit from the installation of a water tap with the help of the WUAs, their 'rivals' did not support their efforts. They also did not want to use the water from the tap once it had been built. They did not approach their neighbours even when their own well had become contaminated. At a funeral ceremony, members of the village with a WUA tap discovered the desperate water problem faced by their neighbours and offered them a few buckets of water for free. Following on from this gesture, a delegation was sent to that village to apologise for the hostile relations that had been perpetuated. One Water Point Committee member explained:

> *[W]hen they apologised, we asked the other water users to allow them to come and use our facility as the ZAEWUA had taught us that water is life and we must assist others in accessing it (Focus Group Discussion at Jokala water Point in ZAEWUA area).*

In this case water was a vector for peace and rival villages buried their differences and talked to one another about water concerns – sharing water and recognising a commonality that water is life.

For peri-urban WUAs, Mtandile Water User Association (MWUA) was among the first of six low income WUAs established in Lilongwe by Water Aid in partnership with Lilongwe Water Board (LWB), the utility

company and a local NGO to solve water problems in 2006. The Mtandile area, like the other five low income areas under this intervention had their water supply disconnected due to unpaid water bills to LWB. The bill had accumulated to US$ 1,000,000. WaterAid provided the funding, and a local NGO facilitated some aspects of WUAs formulation and establishment, whilst the LWB as the primary service provider had a direct relationship with WUAs through their Kiosk Management Unit (KMU) (WaterAid 2008). The WUAs were given different management options to choose from in managing the operation of water kiosks. They choose to manage kiosks themselves, which ordinarily involves collection of water fees by placing water vendors at each kiosk. The vendors are employed from the community by the WUAs.

The second peri-urban WUA, Nkolokoti-Kachere WUA, was established in 2009 as a pilot by Blantyre Water Board (BWB) in partnership with Water for People, an international NGO and Blantyre City Assembly, the local government authority, after the formation of successful WUAs under the LWB (Interview with Blantyre Water Board official 8 April 2011). The low-income areas in Lilongwe, which previously owed millions of monies in water bills, were paying back the arrears and paying bills on time under the successful WUAs established in these areas. New relationships within the communities were also forged in peri-urban areas mediated mainly with money as consumers and sellers.

Locus of power?

Financial sustainability and community buy-in are required in order for a WUA to fulfil its mandate. This mandate is to make sure that there is a sustainable water supply to the peri-urban and rural areas and this should be achieved through capacity building of community members and through creating opportunities for meaningful community participation. The conflict or tension evident is the balance between full cost recovery and equitable outcomes which ensure that even those who cannot pay have access to water, as required under the human right to water.

When there is insistence on 100 percent cost recovery, the ability for WUAs to be site for genuine participation with resultant decisions having regard to the poor and vulnerable members is undermined. This was evident in peri-urban WUAs where, despite the autonomy on management arrangement stated earlier, it was revealed that most decisions were taken without input from community members. In the case of the Nkolokoti WUA, the Board members revealed, in a focus group discussion, that they were not happy with their Constitution and the way in which the WUA related with BWB, the water utility company. Although representatives of the water utility companies are in both peri-urban WUAs and meet regularly and liaise with the community representatives, the community representatives felt they had no say in the pricing of water services. The water utility companies prescribed water rates to these communities, which included recovering outstanding debts as well as profits to cover the operation costs. There was no meaningful two-way flow of information on this matter and as a result, the WUAs felt disempowered and unable to address the needs of users under their jurisdiction.

The regulation of tariffs without consulting the affected communities undermines the WUAs mandate to ensure access to water for all and to ensure that the needs of the poor and marginalised are taken into account. Such a scenario then reduces the WUA into an agent, accountable to the water utility company, rather than being accountable downwards, to the water users themselves. The emphasis is put on the collection of user fees, thus those who are already marginalised (the poorest of the poor) are denied the human right to water because they can't pay for it. A democratic platform for solving such problems is unavailable as WUA is powerless in ensuring the balance between water as an economic good and water as a public or social good.

In remote rural settings, WUAs have a different experience to that of the peri-urban WUAs because they are able to influence decisions, at least decisions concerning tariffs and cost recovery. There are several factors that contribute to a rural WUA's ability to influence tariffs. Firstly, there is an absence of a water utility company and thus an absence of the insistence on full cost recovery without adequate support for those unable to afford the water. In these instances, community voice is likely to resonate more loudly, whereas in instances where the water utility company is exercising its authority over the WUA, the voices of the constituency

Rural WUAs	Peri-Urban WUAs
• Absence of Water Utility Companies in the production of water • Inclusive criteria for membership into decision making organs • Many opportunities for direct engagement among users in WUAs and therefore better chances to record the needs of the people • Better mechanisms of accountability of representatives who are elected or nominated in consultation with the people they represent and continuous engagement with and get feedback from the users in their area	• Presence of Water Utility Companies with sole mandate in production of water • Rigid and restrictive criteria for membership into decision making organs • Limited engagement with the wider population of user and therefore lack of appreciation of the full extent of the problem • Weak structure in terms of ensuring downward accountability to the people due to limited influence on representatives choice • Previous amounts of unpaid bills

Table 1: Factors contributing to or inhibiting community voice

are more likely to be muted. Second, there is continued financial support to the WUAs in the rural areas by government, at least in areas like in ZAEWUA. This helps mitigating the shortfall from inadequate finances in ensuring access to water. As it will be shown further below, the peri-urban WUAs are more financially sustainable than the rural WUAs, however the needs of the communities are best met in the rural WUAs, because they get assistance, resulting in a balance between equity and efficiency. There is also high reliance on voluntarism in rural areas and collective action that mitigates the cost of water, thus giving more power in taking the needs of the poor into account.

Opportunity to participate

There were clear contrasted experiences on opportunity to participate in WUA structures between the peri-urban and rural areas. This can be illustrated using the MWUA and ZAEWUA as regards the membership to the main decision-making organs.

For MWUA, the main decision making organ is the Board of Trustees which is mandated to make strategic decisions on behalf of the WUA, including the establishment of policies, rules, regulations and budgets (Mtandile WUA Constitution, 2009). The composition of the Board of Trustees, included representatives from among chiefs in the area, the clergy from the main Church denomination, a Muslim clergy representative, a representative of all businesses in the area and the Kiosk Unit manager (Mtandire WUA, 2009). These categories are restrictive and elitist. They are restrictive and elitist in the sense that only a small defined select population in the community has opportunity to take part and represent others in this organ.

The Board in MWUA is responsible for constituting the General Assembly (GA) which meets annually. Although the Constitution proves that all water users must be invited to the GA (Mtandile WUA Constitution), the practice is that the Board only invites representatives from a few select categories of water users (Interview with Board member, Mtandile). Only two names of ordinary water users from each area surrounding a water kiosk are sent to the Board of Trustees who then randomly compiles the final list of ordinary users invited to attend the GA. Although one Board member admitted that those picked users are often relatives of the water vendors, the water vendors are, on the whole, trusted to nominate the right representatives. Each year new nominations must be made and this does mean that a different set of users are able to take their turn in influencing decisions within the association. Despite these measures, accountability of these representatives is difficult to enforce. The opportunity for the broader water user population to contribute to decision making processes are limited. There is no opportunity for the ordinary water user to

share views with the GA representatives simply because the identity of the person who is going to be appointed remains confidential until the appointment has been made.

The limited opportunity for ordinary members to participate in the WUA means that a few elites are invested with considerable power to make decisions as they choose. This jeopardises the opportunity for voices from the marginalised and disadvantaged groups. It also increases tensions between those who are included and those who are not (Goldin, 2013). Furthermore, the issue of gender is completely side-lined. All seven members of the Board are men and there is no requirement for gender representation considered in nominating ordinary members to GA or other categories of stakeholders that attend it.

The MWUA can be contrasted with the wider and more direct opportunities for ordinary members' participation in ZAEWUA. First of all, the GA is established as the main decision-making organ. The GA members are nominated by the village leadership in consultation with villagers in the area under the jurisdiction of the association. Two people are nominated, one male and one female so as to ensure a 50:50 gender representation (GoM, 2010). This provides a greater opportunity for ordinary water users to participate in decisions as, in the case of rural WUAs, there are no rigid categories to be filled. The only prerequisite is that there might be a fair (50/50) gender balance. Members of the GA hold their position for a three year term. This means that there is an opportunity for consultation before the GA where the views of multiple stakeholders (not only those with power) are taken into consideration. Once a date is fixed for the General Assembly, the agenda is distributed so that water users know what is going to be discussed beforehand and they have an opportunity to prepare and present their case. The GA members are also involved in the activities of the WUAs and speak to users regularly. This provides a space for dialogue, debate, discussion and dissent, all of which are attributes of a good democracy and of good water governance.

The GA members are responsible for electing among themselves members to the Board. The requirement is that the board membership must have at least 30% females. Apart from this requirement, any person from the GA can become a board member. The membership to the Board is also therefore flexible and more inclusive than in the Mtandile case as described above. These members are ordinary members of the community and not *per se* elite, as for instance the chiefs are not included in the structures of WUAs. This factor distinguishes the rural and peri-urban areas WUAs and perhaps contributes to greater influence from the water users: there is constant engagement between representatives and ordinary members who are directly involved in nominating or influencing the choice of representatives. Openness and inclusiveness requires that there should be generally opportunity for everyone affected by decisions to take part and influence the outcome of such processes.

Participatory parity

Higher positions in a WUAs were predominately filled by male members and this is especially true when it comes to representation on the Board. In all cases, the Board chairs were male. The table below demonstrates that few women make it into the higher structures of the WUA.

	Men	Women	Total	Women's representation (%)	Chair person
Zomba East WUA	10	3	13	23	male
Nkorokoti WUA	6	3	9	33	male
Chagwa WUA	6	5	11	45	male
Mtandile WUA	7	0	7	0	male

Table 2: Women representation in WUAs boards

The higher numbers of women in the WUAs Boards in the table may be attributed to the 50:50 representations in the GA membership. It guarantees at the very least an opportunity of access to participatory spaces, however as noted in the introduction, beyond access, women must be able to influence decisions.

Gender bias and discrimination are evident in the social perceptions and behavioural norms in WUAs. For instance in a focus group discussion on elections and positions at CWCS, one member expressed the way in which women were marginalised:

> *[I]magine this guy was beaten in elections by a woman! Luckily afterwards the lady accepted to give up her Chairperson position to him and took up the position he was elected to, as Secretary to the Board (Focus group discussion at Chagwa with Board members).*

In another interview with a female Board member of ZAEWUA, it was clear that the above statement is not exceptional and one woman who served on the Board felt that she was constantly undermined by the male Board members simply because she is a woman (Interview of female Board member at Songani, Zomba East). She explained an incident when she was entrusted to lead a delegation in an area to replace a GA member after the previous holder had left the area. Several names were put forward from the community. The favourite in the meeting, which comprised of two members of the Board and community leaders, did not qualify as he had not lived in the area for at least a year nor had he had training, like most of the other candidates. The woman in question could not accept him as a member because she felt that he was not qualified. Her fellow Board member shouted at her stating that she is 'just a woman with no brains and cannot therefore be listened to.' The Board member went over her head and approved the 'unqualified' person as a GA representative of the area.

These utterances show how deep cultural norms and values about gender roles are entrenched in the hearts and minds of people; how serious concerns of gender bias and discrimination are manifest; and how they silence the voices of women and make meaningful participation by women very difficult. This was also evident during a focus group discussion where I observed that one member of an Executive Committee in Nkolokoti was too inhibited to raise her voice in the meeting and was only comfortable with whispering her ideas to another male member sitting next to her when questions were asked. When questions were directed to a woman, male members more often answered on behalf of women. At meetings organised either by the WUA or by community leaders regarding water problems, men also dominated. The sitting arrangement also reflected a hierarchy, with women sitting on a mat on the ground and men occupying the available seats. This also reflects cultural norms, which require a woman to give up her seat to a male as a sign of respect to the man. According to Nkonya (2008), this is a sign of submission and restricts women's voice in these participatory spaces. Similarly, Agarwal (2001), who observed such gendered behaviour, noted that it makes participation less effective as men are easily recognised to make contributions and even receive higher priority.

Women are invisible and rarely speak to make contributions and even when they do, they do not carry the same weight. Cultural norms are known to inhibit women's voices to express their views. Membership itself does not guarantee the equal opportunity to debate, discuss and decide on issues related to water. It is thus essential that attention is paid to the dynamics of power that might mute the voices of some and amplify the voices of others.

Typically, at a meeting organised by the ZAEWUA Board to address concerns of vandalism on water pipes, men volunteered their opinion and suggested solutions whereas women had to be prompted to give an opinion on the matter. The Chief present at the meeting remarked on this and said 'Women where are you? Don't these matters being discussed affect you?' One woman promptly stood up to make her contribution. As she began to speak, the Chief spoke again asking her to sit down and speak while seated like the rest of them (men) had done. What constitutes good deliberation by men may not be in line with the way a woman chooses to participate and the way a woman is compelled to participate may impact her ability to communicate or articulate her views. It might need to be quite different from the way in which men participate and this may also have been what prevented the women from contributing. Argumentative, assertive and confrontational discussion, as it was the case here because of the recurrent problem of vandalism in the same village, may have been a contributing factor to women not contributing (Young, 1996). As Young (1996) argues, women may fail to speak in public because of the difference in style of speech from men; women might

prefer non-argumentative modes like storytelling and greeting. Different forms of deliberation should thus be recognised as legitimate parts of deliberation. As a result of the Chief's prompting, three of the five women present at the meeting of 46 people raised their voices. The Chief paid attention to the voices of the women, recognising that they might be able to contribute to a better understanding of the reason for vandalism and to help find solutions to counteract this.

At another meeting under ZAEWUA, the Chief expressed his discontent that women, despite the fact that they might be in leadership position i.e. members of the board, were marginalised or insulted. The Chief urged women to report to him secretly if they experienced any form of harassment and he chastised one of the traditional leaders who had insulted female leader with denigrating remarks such as 'you are uneducated' despite the fact that she was, in fact, better at her job than he was because she had served longer and understood and enforced the WUA rules. One of the women leaders responded to the Chief's call to report in 'secret' and stated:

> *[N]o we won't come in secret because then there will not be transparency in dealing with the issue.We will come in the open so that everyone knows we have reported and can see how you deal with the issue (Mindano meeting).*

This progressive standpoint that the Chief adopted was uncommon. The women's resilience to claim their rightful place in voicing their needs and asserting equality was evident. However, many were inhibited by the structural and cultural obstacles, especially in shared spaces with men. Hence, even though they were present in these spaces, there was need for challenging these cultural norms inhibiting their voice. The ability to bring about positive change will require addressing the factors identified in this study, such as gendered behavioural norms and social perception, that undermine women's ability to participate on an equal basis with men. This will entail challenging cultural imperialism but also addressing women's resource base in terms of material and non-material endowment to ensure they are placed in a position of equality with men or they are able to challenge and assert their equality.

Water point committees as *counterpublics*

Women in the rural areas are well represented in the grassroots Water Point Committees (WPC) which provide a space for women to engage with water concerns. Users living in the village where a facility has been installed form part of the WPC which is at the bottom of other WUA structures in rural areas. The structure at the time in all rural WUAs had the GA at the top, then board of trustees, followed by the secretariat and then WPC. The WPC were required to have 6 elected members who must hold regular meeting with all water users. The required gender ratio in these committees is 60:40, with women in the majority (Government of Malawi, 2010). In reality most positions held in the WPCs are filled by women with just one man at times; who is often inactive and ineffectual. Although a WPC has a limited mandate of fee collection and efficient service, they provide what Fraser would call a *subaltern counterpublic* or *counterpublics* where the marginalised women are able to gain experience and practice to articulate their problems among fellow women before entering the other spaces they are normally excluded from. It is a space where women discuss and plan around immediate issues of access to water, user fees and so forth.

For instance, in ZAEWUA, one WPC had decided to raise the user fees collected in order to keep part of the money for the development of the facility and a small home garden. In another village, where the women are into subsistence farming, the WPC collects produce soon after harvest and sells it to cover fees for the whole year. The WPC therefore provides an ideal space for women to talk to one another about water issues and to make decisions that address specific needs and interests and that directly impact on their everyday access to water. Regular meetings are held with the water users where rules of access are agreed on as well as management and monitoring the performance of the facility.

In peri-urban areas, there are no WPCs. Individual water vendors take the place of WPCs. These are part of employed members of the secretariat tasked to sell water to users and report maintenance needs. Despite women domination as vendors, very few find a seat at the

high tables where decisions regarding policy and regulation are taken. Further, there is limited meaningful engagement between the water vendors and the water users as the vendors' primary obligation is fulfilling their contractual work obligations in extracting fees. Hence, compared to the WPC in rural areas, there is no real engagement or agency of users.

Conclusion

The paper argues that under the human right to water, Malawi must establish access to water as a legal entitlement. The normative content of this right includes both the substantive and procedural. The procedural component focuses on participation and agency of people in policy formulation and implementation. States have obligations to ensure that the prerequisite conditions necessary to take up participatory spaces and influence water governance are guaranteed. This leads to participatory living within water governance that ensures voice and benefit.

The research found that to ensure that community participation contributes to equitable access to water for all there must be wider and open opportunities for the direct participation of water users and accountability of leaders. It also found that the locus of power must be within the WUAs; Agency and equitable outcomes are however inhibited where the locus of power resides outside WUA. Women in the rural areas use the limited spaces available to engage and advance each other's lives. WUAs are therefore platforms for communities to realise their human right to water for themselves. Where it is facilitated with continued financial support as well as other mechanisms to ensure their participation, better outcomes are evident. The paper recommends that government ensures stronger representation and voice in the WUAs. This can be done by opening up spaces for users to have direct participation at different levels and opportunities to choose and hold representatives accountable for decisions made.

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Water Governance and Household Water Security in Botswana
The Case of Ngamiland District

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Abstract

The paper analyses water governance approaches that are aimed at enhancing household water security in Botswana in general and Ngamiland in particular. Qualitative (that is, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation) and quantitative (structured household questionnaire) data collection methods were used. This work was part of the first author's PhD degree in Natural Resources Management and is centered on data collected between February 2012 and March 2014. The paper is therefore based on information for the post-water reform period for Botswana which began in 2009. It highlights that the water governance approaches used in Botswana are not enhancing water security as a result of inappropriate legislation, which does not take into consideration current water management approaches like integrated water resources management (IWRM). The paper notes the following, i) there is high levels of household water insecurity in Ngamiland, ii) institutions responsible for water supply are not effective in ensuring water availability, iii) there is limited stakeholder participation in water management and iv) water management institutions do not collect much revenue from households as the water supplied is highly subsidized and some of the households do not pay for the water that they use. The paper concludes that the Government of Botswana has to reform its water legislation so that it can be in line with water management approaches which are capable of enhancing water security for households.

Keywords: *water governance; water security; households; Ngamiland; Botswana*

Introduction

The 1990s witnessed a global shift in water governance as policy reforms leaned towards the adoption of integrated water resources management (IWRM) approach which was developed and popularised by international conferences which include the Rio and Dublin Conferences of 1992 and the 2nd World Water Forum (2000). These conferences paved the way for IWRM to be put on the political agenda. The recognition of the approach by the United Nations (UN) gave IWRM an official status as an appropriate global water management framework (Keskinen, 2010).

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) adopted IWRM as an approach for the management of the region's 15 transboundary basins (SADC, 2011). A number of Southern African countries which include Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe embraced IWRM and put in place policies and legislation which incorporate elements of IWRM (Kujinga & Jonker, 2006; Kujinga & Manzungu, 2004). Countries such as Botswana have embraced the IWRM approach but are still in the process of reforming their water sectors so that they can be in line with IWRM principles.

This article, therefore, analyses water resource governance in Botswana and how it impacts on household water security. The paper further analyses the extent to which Botswana has adopted IWRM principles and the impact that this is having on household water security.

Defining water governance

Governance in general refers to how economic, political and administrative authorities exercise their roles in the management of a country's affairs at all levels (Lautze et al., 2011; Pahl-Wostl et al., 2010). The process of governance comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences (Pahl-Wostl et al., 2010). Water governance refers to the range of political, social, economic and administrative systems that are in place to develop and manage water resources, and the delivery of water services, at different levels of society (GWP, 2000). Water governance covers the manner in which allocative and regulatory politics are exercised in the management of water and other natural resources and broadly embraces the formal and informal institutions by which authority is exercised (Lautze et al., 2011). However, the water sector is part of the broader social, political and economic developments and is affected by decisions outside it.

Materials and methods

Study area

The study was undertaken in the North-West District (also known as Ngamiland) of Botswana (Figure 1) which, according to the 2011 national census, has a population of 158,104 (Central Statistics Office, 2011). The district is administered from Maun Village by the North West District Council (NWDC). For administrative purposes, North West District is further sub-divided into Ngami and Okavango sub-district authorities, administered from Maun Village and Gumare respectively. According to the 2011 national census, Maun Village has a population of 60,263 (Central Statistics Office, 2011).

The main physical features of Ngamiland District are the Okavango River, which is part of a basin shared between Angola, Botswana and Namibia (Figure 1). The Okavango River in Botswana forms a large delta-like feature (actually an alluvial fan) which is a Ramsar site and a world heritage site known as the Okavango Delta (McCarthy & Ellery, 1998; McCarthy et al., 1986).

The main commercial activities in the district are tourism and livestock rearing (Motsholapheko et al., 2010). However, Ngamiland has a poverty rate of 37.6% as opposed to the national rate of 20.7% (African Economic Outlook, 2013; Central Statistics Office, 2011) while 15.3% of the economically active population is unemployed as opposed to the national average which stands at 20% (Central Statistics Office, 2011).

The study was undertaken in gazetted (formal) and ungazetted (informal) settlements of Ngamiland. Gazetted settlements, because of their status, have water

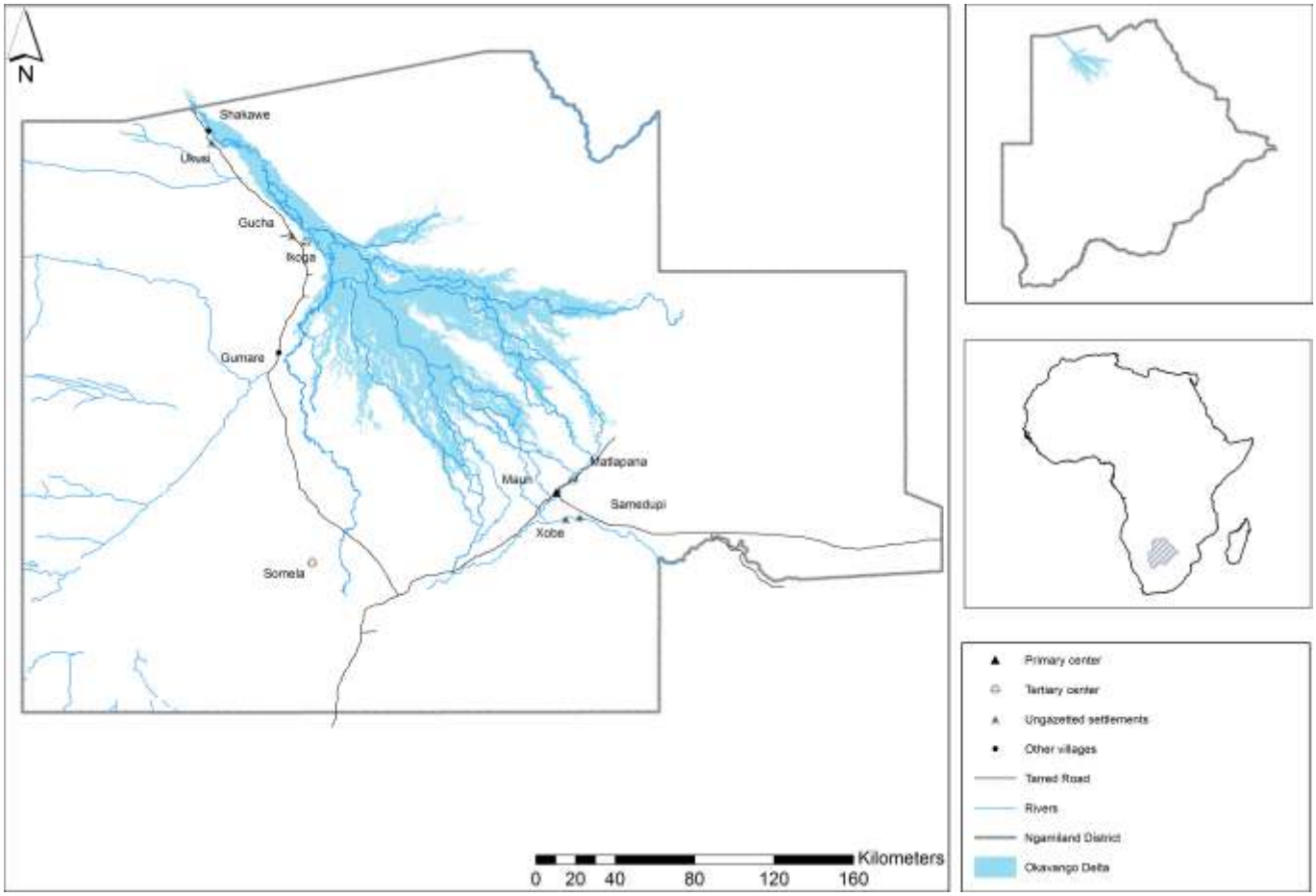

Figure 1: Map showing the study areas (Source: Okavango Research Institute, 2014)

supply, roads, schools, health and police services. These are established based on population size as well as other factors which include economic potential, employment generation, availability of natural resources such as water for sustaining the settlement (Government of Botswana, 1998). Gazetted settlements are divided into three categories, namely, primary, secondary and tertiary centers (Government of Botswana, 1998).

Primary centres are sub-divided into 3 levels and each level has a specific population range, for example, primary centre I, 20,000 – 49,999 (e.g. Maun Village), primary centre II, 50,000 – 99,999 and primary centre III, 100,000 and above (e.g. Gaborone) (Government of Botswana, 1998). The population range of secondary centres is 10,000 – 19,999. These play a key role as district or sub-district headquarters such as Gumare (Government of Botswana, 1998). Tertiary centre settlements (sub-divided into I–IV) have population ranging from 250 to 9,999 (Table 1) (Government of Botswana, 1998).

Tertiary centre category	Population range
I	5,000 – 9,999
II	1,000 – 4,999
III	500 – 999
IV	250 – 499

Table 1: Tertiary settlement categories (Source: Government of Botswana, 1998)

Type I tertiary centres are not found in Ngamiland District though all the other categories, that is, II–IV are there. Ungazetted settlements have a population of less than 250 people and do not have legal entitlement to social services delivery like gazetted settlements (Kgomotso & Swatuk, 2006).

Data collection methods

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used mainly by the first author in the collection of data between February 2012 and March 2014 (see Figure 2). The article is therefore based on information for the post-water reform period for Botswana which began in 2009. Qualitative methods were used to gather data on meanings, opinions, feelings and perceptions regarding water governance, water security and IWRM. These issues were not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency (Neuman, 2000; Schwandt, 1994). Qualitative methods enabled the researchers to interact closely with the households and the service providers who include the Department of Water Affairs (DWA), Water Utilities Corporation (WUC) and the NWDC. The methods employed included key informant interviews, participant observation, unstructured/informal interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Key informants included members of village development committees, ward councillors, traditional leaders and relevant officials from the WUC, NWDC and DWA. The FGDs were conducted by the first author with ordinary community members. Participant observations were done in all the settlements where the principal researcher (i.e. the first author) spent some time. The principal researcher resided in Matlapana for three years, a settlement affected by water shortages. Data was also collected from relevant documentation obtained from the DWA, NWDC and the WUC.

Quantitative data collection was carried out through the use of a structured household questionnaire between May and August 2012. This instrument was used to gather data on general household characteristics, that is, gender and age of household heads, household water sources, the extent of water security or insecurity, institutions involved in water management, water policy and legal issues, the extent of stakeholder participation, water pricing and payments.

Sampling

The study was undertaken mainly by the first author (under the supervision of the co-authors) in 8 purposively sampled sites. The settlements were purposively sampled for various reasons as articulated in Table 2.

Settlement	Settlement category	Population size (2011)	Total number of listed households	Number of households sampled	Reasons for sampling
Maun Village	Primary centre III	4105	933	295	To understand water governance issues in the only primary center settlement in Ngamiland
Matlapana A	Tertiary centre II	1449	329	99	To understand water governance in a tertiary settlement experiencing acute water shortages since 2009
Ikoga	Tertiary centre III	673	153	46	To explore water governance in a settlement receiving water supply from a surface water treatment plant
Somelo	Tertiary centre IV	600	136	41	To understand water governance issues in a settlement located 40km away from surface water resources
Gucha	Ungazetted	88	20	20	To understand water governance issues in a settlement designated as ungazetted in Ngamiland
Samedupi	Ungazetted	286	65	20	
Ukusi	Ungazetted	261	60	19	
Xobe	Ungazetted	260	60	20	
Total		**7722**	**1571**	**554**	

Table 2: Sample sizes by settlement (Sources: Central Statistics Office 2011; Study settlements' Records; Kujinga et al, 2014a)



Figure 2: Data collection methods, focus group discussions, observation and structured questionnaire administration

A 30% household sample size in all the settlements was adopted (see Table 2) using population information from the Central Statistics Office, NWDC and local village leadership. Households in each settlement were listed and each (household) was assigned a randomly generated number. Trained enumerators administered questionnaires to household members from the age of 15 who had information on household water issues. Sixty-two percent (62%) of the respondents were women. A total of 554 questionnaires were administered.

Participants for FGDs were randomly picked from male and female-headed households from different areas of each settlement. The participants included those interviewed in the survey as well as those who were not interviewed. At least one FGD was held in each study settlement. Each FGD was attended by at least 16 participants. Key informants were purposively sampled from settlements, DWA, WUC and NWDC.

Results and analysis

Access to water sources by households in Ngamiland

Overall water governance (e.g. policy) in Botswana put more emphasis on ensuring access to water for domestic purposes for all households in gazetted settlements from improved sources within a distance of not more than 400m (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2008). This has enabled the country to achieve 97% coverage in terms of access to improved water sources for the population. There is a statistical association between settlement category and type of main water sources used by households (Pearson's chi-square value = 1203.1919, degrees of freedom=42, p=0.000), significant at 5% level. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the households across the different settlement categories have access to improved domestic water supply sources, that is, public standpipes (23.1%), standpipes in-yard (46.8%), taps inside the house (10.8%) and neighbour's standpipes (7.2%). Twelve percent (12%) of the households who access water from untreated sources are mainly from ungazetted settlements (see also Kujinga et al., 2014). Households from primary centre (Maun Village) and tertiary centres (Ikoga, Matlapana and Somelo) have improved water sources, while ungazetted settlements (i.e. Gucha, Samedupi and Xobe) access water from untreated sources, rivers or streams. Ukusi is an exception as households in this settlement access water from public standpipes. The political leadership in the Okavango sub-district authority where Ukusi is located managed to convince the NWDC to connect those ungazetted settlements located along a water mainline. Ukusi village households started receiving water supply services during the late 1990s (see Kujinga et al., 2014).

Water insecurity in Ngamiland

Though the majority of households (88%) in Ngamiland have access to improved water sources, this has not guaranteed access to water on a sustainable basis. Households from settlements where they have access to improved water sources reported that they started experiencing water supply challenges around 2000 and the situation got worse with each passing year. The majority of households experienced water supply challenges between 2005 and May 2011.

Seventy-four percent (74%) of the households across all the settlements experienced extreme water shortages and challenges from June 2011 to June 2012. Data from the individual settlements studies show that the majority

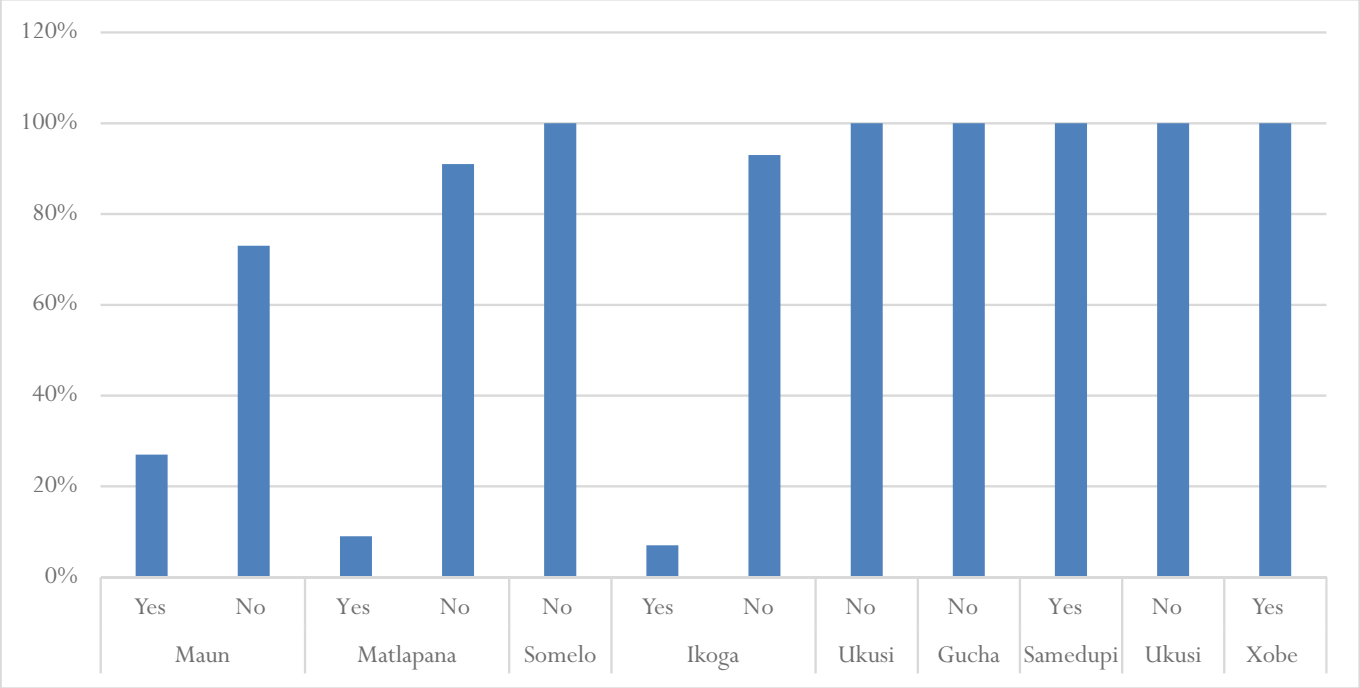

Figure 3: Availability of water from main source within the last 12 months

of households experienced extreme water insecurity during this period as they did not have water readily available from their main sources (Figure 3).

During the time of the survey, 33% of the households in gazetted settlements had experienced a cut-off in supply within the previous 24 hours while 32% did not have water supply from their main sources. All the surveyed households from Matlapana and Somelo were last supplied with water from their main sources in 2009.

Figure 4: A resident of Samedupi Village fetching water from the Boteti River

All (100%) households from ungazetted settlements, that is, Gucha, Samedupi and Xobe, use untreated water accessed from rivers and streams, which has a high potential to be polluted by droppings from wild and domestic animals (Figure 4). One resident from Gucha said that:

> *We share this water with cattle, horses, goats, donkeys and baboons. As you know, animals have no manners as they just drop their faeces and urinate in these water sources putting us at risk.*

Key informant interviews as well as a review of literature revealed that settlements such as Maun Village have been facing water insecurity since the turn of the century. This was also revealed in a petition submitted by residents to the Minister of Minerals, Energy and Water Resources through Maun Village DWA Station Manager in March 2011.

Part of the petition read:

> *… the Department of Water Affairs in Maun has failed to reliably provide adequate domestic water to the residents. For over ten years now, we have been subjected to deteriorating quality and constant interruptions in the*

Figure 5: Households in Maun Village coping with water insecurity

supply of water. Many wards in the village continue to experience chronic shortages, going for days, weeks and months without water. This has had negative effects on household welfare, delivery of essential social services such as medical care and business. The situation has deepened poverty, reduced the standard and quality of living, aggravated sanitation and eroded the credibility and image of Maun as a tourism transit port and destination area (Kujinga et al., 2014).

When households experience water insecurity, the most common strategy to cope with the challenge is to fetch water from unprotected sources (Figure 5). Households from Maun Village (35%), Matlapana (96%), fetch water from Thamalakane River and those from Ikoga (93%) do so from Ikoga River. Households from Somelo are located 40 km from the nearest surface water source, as a result, they either access saline water from a borehole within the village or they wait for Water Utilities Corporation truck to deliver freshwater to the village.

During times of water insecurity, women and girls (96%) from the different villages studied, are the ones who have the responsibility of ensuring that there is water available within the households. They mostly go to the different unprotected sources with containers, usually 20 or 25 litres which they will fill and head load to their homes. The women take an average of 68 minutes fetching water on a daily basis.

Men from different settlement categories only get involved in fetching water mainly if there is some form of mechanised equipment to use. Donkey drawn carts are usually used by men from Gucha (20%), Matlapana (25%), Maun (4%), Xobe (35%) Samedupi (35%), Ikoga (18%) and Somelo (27%). In other instances, some households use light vehicles to fetch water, for example, Maun (12%) and Matlapana (2%) (see also Kujinga et al., 2014). In most instances, when either the donkey drawn cart or the vehicle are not available, the majority of men desist from fetching water. However, the use of either donkey drawn carts or light vehicles enable men to transport more water than what women can head load. In some cases, men can transport as much as 0.5m^3 of water on a single trip.

Some of the strategies used by households to ensure water availability at the household level include, purchasing of bottled water, buying bulk water which is off-loaded in storage tanks which range from 1m^3–10m^3. This is mainly done by households in Maun village. During the rain seasons women from 63% of the households become involved in rainwater harvesting. They do this by placing containers below rooftops and harvest rainwater. Some households have improvised rainwater harvesting systems which enable them to collect substantial amounts of water (see also Kujinga et al., 2014).

Institutions for water governance

The Ministry of Minerals, Energy and Water Resources (MMEWR) has the overall responsibility of coordinating developments and operational activities in the water sector. It mainly provides leadership and policy directions to the DWA and WUC by formulating, directing and coordinating overall national policies on water resources. Specific activities such as programmes and projects are carried out by the DWA and WUC.

Until 2009, water supply in Botswana was the responsibility of three institutions, namely WUC, which supplied water to cities and towns like Gaborone, Francistown and Jwaneng, among others; DWA, which

supplied water to large villages such as Maun Village; and the local authorities supplied water to small villages. Prior to April 2013, only DWA and the NWDC were the active participants in water supply in Ngamiland.

The two institutions which have been involved in water supply in Ngamiland, i.e. DWA and NWDC, worked independently as they fell under two different ministries of Minerals, Energy and Water Resources and Local Government, respectively. Though this was the case, infrastructure used by the NWDC was put in place by the former for operation and maintenance. This basically meant that there was a degree of dependence by NWDC on the DWA as it could not independently plan on its own the implementation of projects focusing on water infrastructure development. According to key informants from both DWA and NWDC, the two institutions were basically playing the same role of water supply. What differed were the areas in which they supplied water. The DWA supplied water to Maun Village while the NWDC serviced all tertiary settlements including a few ungazetted settlements. Central government funded both institutions for the same function.

In some cases, DWA and NWDC had parallel infrastructure for water supply in the same locations. For example, both institutions managed separate boreholes along Thamalakane River and floodplain as well as separate transmission lines. Matlapana Village experienced a water supply problem since 2009; despite the fact that DWA was able to transmit some water through Matlapana to Maun Village. There were no arrangements by the two institutions to work together to ensure that Matlapana Village could get water from the DWA water supply system. The arrangement confused the people of Matlapana who could not understand why the DWA was able to get water from the area and supply Maun Village while they did not receive any water supply services. The takeover of water supply by WUC has not rectified this issue as households from Matlapana continue to face water supply shortages.

The functions of both DWA and NWDC were negatively affected by the fact that funding from government was always tied to specific identified budget lines. They did not have the liberty to transfer funds from one budget line to another even if there was a critical problem. Thus, control of expenditure by the central government crippled water supply as DWA or NWDC could not quickly respond to situations which needed to be addressed urgently.

One of the major challenges faced by both DWA and NWDC was the theft of engines and diesel from boreholes. The situation disrupted water supply to villages (North West District Council, 2008). All boreholes operated by DWA and NWDC which were taken over by WUC, are powered by diesel engines and as a result, require someone to physically go to each one of them to refuel and to undertake maintenance. During this process, those who are tasked with the duty of refuelling and carrying out maintenance occasionally put some diesel aside for their own personal use. WUC also encountered challenges related to ceasing of borehole engines and effects of floods on the operation of boreholes located on floodplains (North West District Council, 2010b). These challenges were also encountered by DWA and NWDC.

Water reforms, which commenced in 2009, identified the Water Utilities Corporation as the most appropriate institution to supply water to the more than 500 villages across Botswana. The reforms were aimed at separating water resources management from service delivery. As a result, WUC was handed the responsibility of service delivery and DWA became responsible for water resource management and planning. In order to reduce the number of institutions involved in water supply, district councils were relieved of this task. WUC started taking over water supply and distribution in all other districts in 2009, except for Ngamiland where it took over at the beginning of April 2013.

A survey conducted in April 2014 revealed that the majority (97%) of households from gazetted settlements where WUC is mandated to supply water said that not much changed in terms of water supply since the Corporation took over. All the households from the different settlement categories expected an improvement in water supply as a result of the takeover by WUC, but this did not immediately happen. In Matlapana and Somelo in 2015, two years after WUC took over water supply, all households continued to experience acute water supply challenges from their main water sources. With regards to

Somelo, WUC hauls water to the settlement since taking over the supply of water from NWDC. Households in Somelo complained that the hauled water was never adequate. They are always forced to be conservative in the use of water as the tanker which supplies them with water does not always turn up. In Ikoga, households reported that they still face regular water shortages since the takeover of water supply by WUC. In January and February 2014, households went for two weeks without any water supply and had to depend on water hauling.

A representative of WUC said that the water supply situation in the District remains critical, though there have been some improvements. According to WUC, Maun Village started receiving water for 24 hours a day after the completion of a 6,000m^3 treatment plant installed in the village and commissioned at the beginning of 2014. However, storage for the Village remains below expectation as this stands at 8,000m^3 against a daily demand of 10,000m^3. Treatment plants in the Okavango Sub-district which include villages of Mohembo East and Sepopa need to be upgraded to enable them to supply water to an increasing population. The Mohembo East Treatment Plant which was constructed in 1996 to supply Shakawe with a population of 3,298 then, but this has grown to more than 6,000. The plant further supplies water to 4 more gazetted and ungazetted villages like Ukusi, thereby raising demand and leading to frequent shortages (North West District Council, 2009, 2013). Moreover, both the Mohembo East and Sepopa Treatment Plants need to be installed with flocculators to help in lengthening the lifespan of the sand used in the water filtration process.

The Corporation imports 50 tonnes of sand for use in the water filtration process in treatment plants from South Africa every 6 months at a total cost of USD300,000.00. According to the Ngamiland WUC General Manager, this is unsustainable. There are also costs related to diesel for borehole engines and for water hauling. The DWA which used to operate the boreholes, was spending an average of USD30,000.00 a month on diesel for the boreholes. A further USD20,000.00 each month was spent on running costs (i.e. fuel, tyres, maintenance and overtime for drivers) on 4 trucks used to haul water to communities in need of water when the water shortage was critical. When demand for water was lower, the DWA was spending an average of USD5,000.00 a month.

In terms of water quality, WUC argues that when it took over water supply, only 20% of the water in the district was of acceptable quality, but it has been able to improve to 70%. Though this is still below the required standards, which, for example, require that water supplied to households be free from any micro-biological contaminants, efforts are being made to ensure that only clean water is accessed by the households. Water quality for Maun Village is mainly affected by the fact that water has for some years been pumped straight into the system without prior treatment.

Across all the gazetted settlements, infrastructure for water, which includes transmission lines and storage tanks has not been properly maintained in the past. As a result, WUC is spending significant amounts of money on operations and maintenance.

One of the major challenges encountered by WUC is related to the absence of measuring devices on public standpipes. As a result, there is no information about how much water goes out through each particular public standpipe in the district. Mainly because of this, WUC cannot adequately account for all the water supplied. DWA and NWDC did not install meters at public standpipes to monitor the amount of water accessed through such sources. WUC wants to convert all public standpipes into metered pre-paid standpipes so as to regulate the amount of water being used as well as to ensure that households pay for water once they exhaust their monthly free allocations. It is estimated that 45% of the water supplied by WUC is drawn through public standpipes, some of which are faulty and lose out water continuously. A total of 324,000m^3 is supplied each month by WUC to households in the district and 145,800m^3 cannot be accounted for[1].

1. This was revealed by the WUC General Manager during an interview

Stakeholder participation

There is limited stakeholder participation in the management of water resources in Botswana, in general, and Ngamiland, in particular. Water issues, such as supply and distribution, are discussed in forums such as Village Development Committee and council meetings. Households pointed out that they are represented by ward councillors (81%), members of parliament (9%), village development committees (5%) and traditional leaders (5%) on water supply issues. Water issues, such as supply and quality in Ngamiland are usually discussed at council level by ward councillors, council officials and representatives from DWA and WUC.

Issues discussed in council meetings include:

- Water supply shortages experienced in different settlements.
- Flooding of boreholes along floodplains.
- Inadequate funds allocated for private water connections in the district. As a result, in August 2009, the water connections backlog stood at 3,000 (North West District Council, 2009). In February 2010, a total of 1,041 private connections were made (North West District Council, 2010b).
- Inadequate funding for financing water supply in the district (North West District Council, 2009).
- Limited water storage for Maun Village. For example, in 2010, storage was 4,100m3 with a deficit of 12,538m^3 that is required to achieve the 48 hour storage (North West District Council, 2010a).
- Increased developments in Maun Village, for example, houses and industries have increased the water demand in the Village (North West District Council, 2010a).
- NWDC's concern about DWA's inability to brief the council on the water situation in the district (Maun Administrative Authority, 2010).

The councillors are mandated to inform their wards on general development issues, including water supply discussed in council meetings. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the households across all the settlements highlighted that their representatives on water supply and quality issues have not been effective given the water insecurity which they frequently encounter.

All of the households are not given an opportunity to play a direct role in water management, in general and water supply, in particular. This is mainly due to the absence of specific stakeholder platforms for water management. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the households said that they can play a role in water supply in the district, especially in giving their service providers advice on how water supply can be done. Though councillors mainly represent households in water supply and quality issues, 87% of the households have never been consulted on issues related to water supply by either the DWA, NWDC or WUC.

During some of the village development meetings where various issues are discussed, including water, officials from DWA and NWDC are invited to discuss water issues with the communities. After the takeover of water supply by WUC, officials from the corporation got invited to discuss water issues with the communities. Households usually raise concerns about prolonged water shortages, billing and water payments at such meetings. Common complaints from residents were about water availability which can be summed up into what one Matlapana resident said at one of the meetings:

> *We have gone for years without reliable water supply. We are now forced to fetch untreated water from the river, and this is detrimental to our health.*

Households highlighted that they are not consulted much with regards to water supply. Even when it comes to the setting up of water charges, they have no knowledge about how this is done.

Water payments

Sixty-two percent (62%) of households from gazetted settlements pay for the water that they use for domestic purposes. Of the 62% households paying for water, 56% are from Maun Village. There is a statistical association between settlement and payment for water (Pearson's chi-square test value=387.4054, degrees of freedom=7, p=0.000), at 5% significant level. Households across the different settlement categories pay an average of

Figure 6: Poorly maintained public standpipe in Matlapana (right) and a non-functional public standpipe with a pre-paid water meter in Sadie suburb

USD3.50 per month for the water that they use. The majority of households in the other settlements are either not paying for water or they access water from public standpipes for free. All the public standpipes do not have meters, and as a result, water accessed from such sources is not accounted for. Officials from NWDC, DWA and WUC feel that water is being misused by households at public standpipes as some is actually used to water livestock while some of the standpipes are not maintained, leading to leakages (Figure 6). This prompted WUC to consider installing pre-paid water meters which will record how much water is being used from each public standpipe and also to bill households for water from these points.

Households in Maun Village complained about paying for water despite the fact that they go for prolonged periods of time without any water supply. By the time DWA handed over water supply to WUC, disconnections were being applied to force households to make payments. WUC continued with the disconnections and this compelled most households that were defaulting to start clearing their arrears while other households were encouraged to pay, fearing disconnections. In settlements such as Matlapana where most households have not been receiving water since 2009, the majority of the households with private water connections do not pay for the water that they use for domestic purposes.

DWA and NWDC were not very efficient in the collection of revenue, a situation which led them to be owed huge sums of money by the residents. The NWDC Water Unit officials highlighted that they were collecting 20% of what they were supposed to be collecting from households with private connections. An NWDC official said the following:

> *The situation regarding revenue collection is made worse by elected ward councillors who always resist water disconnections as this is detrimental to their political careers. They feel that residents will view any disconnections as being sanctioned by them. As a result, they will not be voted back into office in future elections.*

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the households that are paying for water said that they are not satisfied with the payments. There is a statistical association between payment of water and satisfaction by households (Pearson's chi-square, degrees of freedom=7, p=0.000), significant at 5% level. The reasons for being dissatisfied include high water charges, unjustified charges and lack of regular supply. They feel that water should be provided to them for free.

Conclusion

Evidence presented in this paper has shown that there is household water insecurity in some areas in Botswana. Ineffective water governance is a major contributing factor to the household water insecurity being experienced across different settlement categories.

Water governance in Botswana is ineffective mainly because it is taking place within a legal and policy vacuum. The move to limit the number of institutions involved in water supply adopted by Botswana is noble. However, the WUC has to guarantee reliability of supply to households.

Reliable water supply to households needs to be improved by ensuring reliable water supply of good quality to households in order to promote the willingness to pay for the resource. At the moment, households do not see the need to pay when supplies are unreliable. Revenue collection needs to be strengthened so that the WUC will be able to function on a sustainable basis. However, the status of the poor who cannot afford relatively high-water charges has to be taken into consideration when issues of water pricing are decided.

Water legislation in Botswana also needs to be revisited so that it can be brought in line with current water management approaches such as IWRM that are meant to enhance water governance, in general, and address water insecurity, in particular.

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"They are the gatekeepers!"

Ethnography of a Meeting of the Regional Government for Water Affairs in Southern Africa

Paul-Malo Winsback

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Abstract

On the 8th and 9th of May 2018, at the beginning of the Namibian winter, the *Safari Hotel* of Windhoek hosted the RBO Workshop, the workshop for transboundary river basin organisations in Southern Africa. An ethnographic study of this gathering made it possible to reveal structural issues at play in the region. This event is indeed a key meeting within a dense institutional body. Its objective is to build consensus, an undertaking which is found in how space is managed during the meeting, and which shows how all participants internalise their role. This meeting is, as such, an opportunity to physically see the embodiment of the regional order, and to distinguish members in post and rank.

Keywords: *experts; SADC; performance; rite; group*

Introduction

On the 8th and 9th of May 2018, at the beginning of the Namibian winter, the luxurious *Safari Hotel* in Windhoek hosted the RBO Workshop, i.e. the workshop for transboundary river basin organisations (RBO). For two days, around 170 national and international civil servants, as well as many experts, met during this major administrative ritual of water affairs in Southern Africa. On observing the meeting, it was possible to understand some of the social phenomena at play in the construction and cohesion of a group of people who, together, form a framework for a regional government for water affairs.

In order to prevent limiting oneself to a formal description, this ethnographic study is enriched with a theoretical apparatus, for which we will roughly outline the foundations. Indeed, we suggest the possibility that the meeting allows participants to produce themselves as a collective, thereby making the specific rules of this regional institutional order visible. This performative premise (the idea that the group exists partly through its formulation) relies on the study of the institutional context and interactions between participants (Tambiah 1979). To this end, we mobilise works on the social rites of two classic sociologists, those of Émile Durkheim and Erving Goffman. With reference to the former, we observe the meeting as a celebration that makes it possible to build, stabilise and maintain a social order by celebrating it – which Durkheim designates in the religious case as a "positive cult" ([1912] 1990, 494). However, while the meeting held in Windhoek is one of

those moments in which the regional water group is embodied, we must not disregard its more seemingly ordinary interactions. With reference to Goffman, in this regard, we can examine sociability in a more subtle way, and take the rites of interaction seriously – these tie-signs which identify relationships between people and show how they have internalised the rules of the world in which they evolve, and with which they interact (Goffman 1956; 1971).

Faced with, at first sight, this disparate group of civil servants, senior officials, engineers, sponsors, consultants and other experts, it could be tempting to only see divisions between sovereign State representatives. The meeting would then only be a formal moment of discussions around a form of regional freshwater governance. Exchanges would take place with detachment on policies, and the consequences of these discussions would only be minimal, insofar as the final decisions regarding the policies would be up to the executive and parliamentarian authorities concerned. Yet, the establishment of an institutional freshwater association in Southern Africa, underlain by actual hierarchies and more or less flexible structures, prompts one to adopt the term 'government'. Indeed, far from the premise of equality between participants, which is intrinsic to the idea of governance, the term 'government' makes it possible to understand differences in status, with significant consequences in the elaboration of common policy frameworks (Hermet 2004). The way in which the event was organised, and the interactions between participants reveal the rules that underlie this water group in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Through observation, we have tried to discover these implicit norms at play in the sociabilities (work relations and small talk), that can sometimes give one the illusion that hierarchies are eliminated or, on the contrary, frozen under the weight of sovereignties.

Let us note also that, methodologically, the moment this observation was made marked the beginning of a doctoral field research, although the research outline was rather vague at the time. The author's still relatively unspoiled outlook, surprised by everything and absolutely unfamiliar with the place and the people, was not, at that stage, too constrained by restrictive questions. In an event which, when all is said and done, is relatively formal, the method assumed that observing trivialities led to understanding the unconceived. The object of this article is not about making a textual analysis or a synopsis – even a critical one – of the statements that were made in Windhoek. While their discourses might lead to better understanding the agents' position (i.e. to know where they stood and what their official agenda was), they only refer to what was let through, i.e. what the agents offered to share about themselves and the institutions they represented. Two years later, and on the basis of a survey mixing ethnography, biographical interviews and archive consultation, confronting this observation with other materials made it possible to take stock and highlight certain regional tendencies. The RBO Workshop in Windhoek, representative of recurring practices is, as such, an observation window on the water sector in the SADC.

In the style of a problematised and introspective report (Delsaut 2020), we propose an ethnographic study in four parts. We first need to present the historical and institutional context of the meeting, and how it fits into the continuity of other similar events, involved in the constitution of a regional government for water affairs. We will then talk about the organisation of the event which reflects a concern for creating consensus, through the evocation of shared referents. Based on this collective construction, we examine, thirdly, the way space is managed during the meeting, which helps to distinguish the roles of all the parties involved within this regional whole. Finally, we examine the participants who are in the forefront rather than others, thereby revealing hierarchies peculiar to this government space, entangled in different institutional orders.

The meeting of an institutionalised water sector

A sector that emerged during the colonial era and that has been undergoing institutionalisation since the liberations

Before describing the RBO workshop, we need to make a brief presentation of the institutional landscape of the region and its history (see also Maupin 2013 in this regard). Indeed, interactions regarding water

management between Southern African States are regular and regulated, and have been since their creation. The many border disagreements brought these administrations to formalise their exchanges during the 20th century, through bilateral committees, some of which still exist today. As a prefiguration of wider agreements, general regional agreements were sometimes concluded between colonial authorities, as was the case for example between South Africa and the Portuguese government in the 1960s. Indeed, both powers were straddling shared catchment basins in the south of the continent around the Kunene River – shared between Angola which was colonised by Portugal, and modern-day Namibia which was then under South African administration – and the Inkomati-Maputo – where the then South African Union was positioned upstream from the basin which flows into the Indian Ocean through Mozambique, which at the time was under Portuguese domination.

In a context of apartheid and wars of independence, a water-sharing agreement was concluded in 1964. Prior to that, in 1948, the Zambezi River, the largest in the region, had even been the subject of a first attempt at shared authority, as proposed to all riparian countries by the Central African Council (under British leadership). Just after the independences and with the creation of the SADC in 1992, interactions gathered pace and the development of regional structures progressively formalised the configuration of a framework for a general water government, south of the continent. The institution of regional integration was, de facto, conceived from the very beginning as a node of production, translation and exchange for a policy framework on water, where the guiding principle was 'co-operation'.

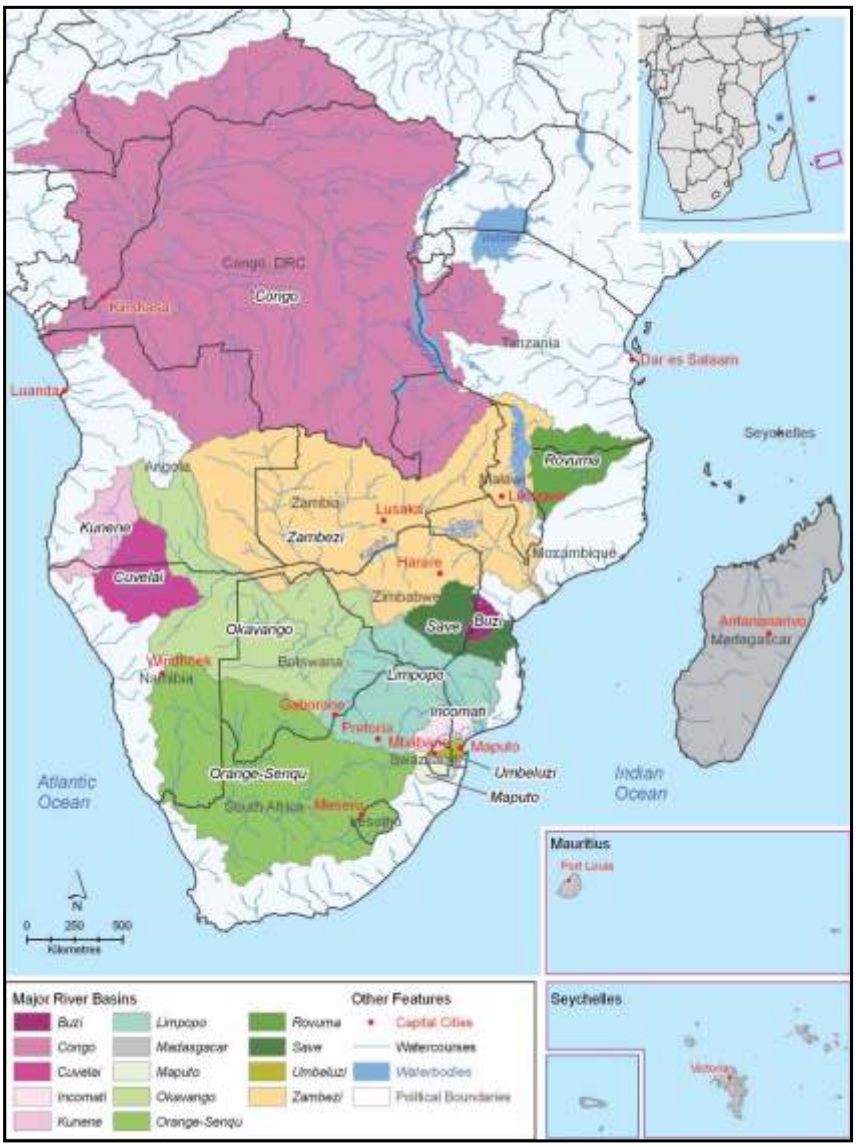

Figure 1: Map of the main shared catchment basins and political borders of the SADC region. (SADC 2016, VIII)

This institutional space is a dense place of normative production (legal instruments, regional strategies, etc.). In 1995, a protocol on shared watercourses was established to regulate exchanges, before being revised in 2000. This protocol is regularly quoted as a legal tool, where it advocates a water administration for every transboundary catchment basin. During the same period, the region's Council of Ministers decided to create a "water co-ordination unit" with offices initially set up in Maseru, Lesotho, before being moved to the premises of the SADC in Gaborone, Botswana. The Water Division, i.e. the name given to this entity, is responsible for enforcing the protocol, and has established an action plan as well as a regional strategy for water management. These non-restrictive instruments, which are revised every five years, constitute a guideline as well as shared objectives for SADC States.

The development and execution of these objectives and programmes go through a heavy institutional network, in which regular meetings make it easier for all parties to get to know and acknowledge one another. In addition to ministerial meetings, water senior officials meet on the occasion of the Water Resources Technical Committee (WRTC), while sponsors meet during the Water Strategy Reference Group (WSRG). The meetings of the WRTC are organised by the Global Water Partnership Southern Africa (GWPSA), a non-governmental institution which, in practice, is the main executive organisation of the Water Division of the SADC. In addition to this are the bilateral meetings (between riparian countries) as well as meetings between countries sharing watercourses, involving mainly River Basin Organisations (RBOs): ORASECOM on the Orange-Senqu, OKACOM on the Okavango, LIMCOM on the Limpopo and ZAMCOM on the Zambezi.

Among all these meetings, two major unavoidable meetings take place alternately every two years, thereby ensuring at least one yearly meeting of all regional representatives: the SADC Water Dialogue which gathers regional water administrators, and the RBO Workshops which gather RBO representatives. These meetings serve as maintenance rituals (Goffman 1971, 73) which aim at chronically recalling the existence of the community and, as such, perpetuating it.

A regional order maintained by gatekeepers

A few days after the RBO Workshop of Windhoek in 2018, as I was describing the scene to a fellow researcher familiar with the regional policies, she exclaimed: "*Yes! They were all there. They are the gatekeepers!*" These gatekeepers are the senior officials who authorise projects, the sponsors who grant funds and the consultants who execute regional programmes. This abstract term hides a collective of people moving in the circles of the SADC water sector, a collective which is difficult to name, partly because its agents cannot name it themselves openly, insofar as they are at the crossroad of many legal sovereignties. The fact that they keep meeting and have legal relations create a de facto community, made possible by relatively similar personal careers and social suitability. As a result, these gatekeepers are the most central constituent members of this discreet regional institutional order, defending its interests in a complex entanglement of loyalties.

This is explained by members moving through or belonging to several institutions in the region (national administration, river basin organisation, advisory committee, etc.). Let us specify, at this stage, that the preparation of the RBO Workshop in Windhoek was carried out by the Namibian State as national host, but also by the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water

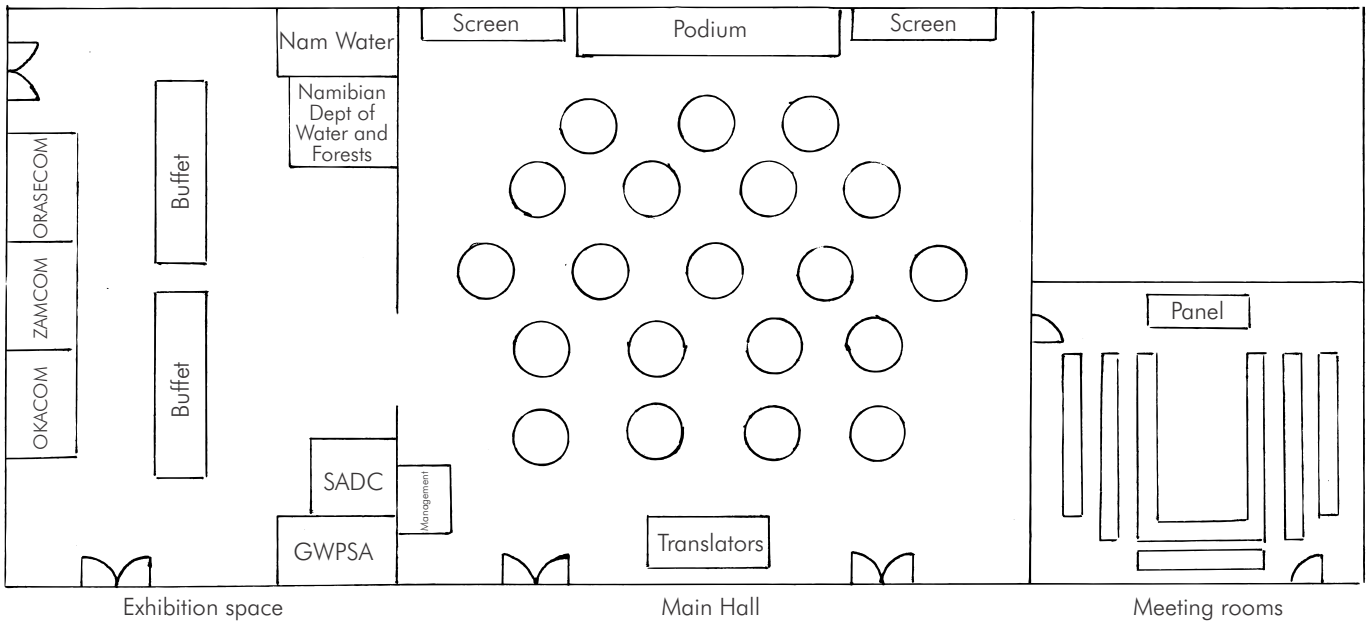

Figure 2: Drawing of the layout of the main rooms at the RBO Workshop in Windhoek © Paul-Malo Winsback

A sector divided into legitimation orders

While the SADC water sector gathers a multiplicity of agents and institutions, it is possible to identify three major categories, each constituting a different legitimation order (i.e. a set of motives giving these agents legitimacy to be members of the regional government).

- The first concerns administrative and political mandates, i.e. the force of the law: this category includes mostly national and international civil servants (representatives of ministries for water affairs, of the SADC, etc.).
- The second concerns diplomas and expertise, i.e. technical legitimation: this category includes guest experts and consultants (research consultancies, international organisations, etc.).
- The third concerns experience, i.e. the long term presence and action in regional affairs, giving agents credit and legitimacy: this category includes "historical" agents who, when they no longer have official membership, are registered as resource persons.

These three categories are not mutually exclusive, and several agents can claim multiple membership. Sponsors, for example, are part of the first and second legitimation orders, i.e. they represent a legal legitimation (as representatives of a national administration) and a technical legitimation (as fund and project execution managers). However, because it concerns a regional institutional space under construction, and because institutions are embodied in people above all, it is possible to raise the assumption that the regional experience register prevails. As described later on in this article, the representative of a key sponsor, who had been strongly put forward during presentations, was relatively on his own outside the discussions held during plenary meetings. In this case, the social capital of agents reinforces their position in the group's symbolic hierarchies.

Commission (OKACOM) and the GWPSA, in the name of the Water Division of the SADC. Also, while protocol demands that the Namibian authorities be put forward, the regional institutions are the ones very much at the centre of the meeting, and it is through and with them that loyalties are played out. GWPSA agents are indeed put into the same category as SADC representatives, which is expressed in the actual layout of the venue (see Figure 2) and in the roles of each and every one: between the stands side by side, the agent who represents the SADC is also a member of the GWPSA. But behind this interpenetration and apart from a well-established institutional world with regular meetings, this event is an opportunity to work on building regional consensus.

Consensus decision-making meetings

One of the organisers' objectives in making members of the water sector of the SADC meet, is to build a form of regional consensus. In this regard, themes are thought out with a view to being federative and little conducive to controversies. As such, the RBO Workshop that was held in Windhoek on the 8th and 9th of May 2018, concerned strategic investments on shared watercourses, while on the 7th of May, the Hotel had been booked for another meeting dedicated to gender mainstreaming. The two days following the main event were used to reorganise and synthetize discussions, in order to produce a final document to be submitted to the Ministers of Water Affairs of SADC Member States, a writing process which was to result in the formalisation of a form of collective stance.

Staging a shared Africanness

The choice of the venue in itself reflected, whether or not deliberately, the construction of a collective. If the hotel was chosen, it was above all because it met the practical conditions imposed by the participants for the meeting to take place: adjustable rooms that were sufficiently wide to host all the participants, including senior officials, in an elegant setting. All the services

offered by the hotel and the fact that it is not located near the city centre, thereby contributing to the preservation of the tranquillity during the meetings, justify why it was chosen. However, the hotel complex, designed like a lodge, with its large entrance gate divided in two by a sentry box housing a guard in uniform, was steeped in evocations of a certain idealised vision of the continent. The place is large and richly decorated, with thick carpets and very high ceilings decorated with mouldings and classic chandeliers. In the building reserved for conferences, the wall and floor decorations showed regional representations of lions, elephants and rhinoceroses on the carpets, as well as paintings of savannah and desert landscapes, among others.

Justified by the regional dimension of the event, the celebration of a certain Africanness was not reduced to mere hotel aesthetics. Indeed, several moments were dedicated to it, punctuating the two-day event. This was embodied, firstly, in the opening and closing ceremonies, with the anthems of the African Union, the SADC and the host country, Namibia, being performed. But it was also expressed, less formally, with performances of traditional Namibian dancing, to the amusement and delight of the participants who reacted by taking photographs with their cell phones and tablets. On another occasion, union was the subject of a short play – which seemed obvious because it is regional and organised around shared resources – entitled *River Cousin Drama*, written and performed by students from the University of Namibia. The play praised, with morality, the unconceived relationships (the characters ignored one another initially) that unify the riparian countries of the Cubango-Okavango River. Three actors represented each a country of the catchment area (Angola, Botswana and Namibia). The river goddess arrived and explained to them that the water was binding them together. Then followed a succession of tableaux, each dealing with what would be a good way to manage resources. The critique targeted two individuals who cultivated the land by using the slash-and-burn technique, and who defecated in the open. A character then appeared to them to let them know that they could not burn the land and that they had to adopt agricultural methods presented as more "sustainable"; another character appeared to tell them that they had to dig a hole in the ground to prevent their excrements from contaminating watercourses. At the end of the performance, owing to these "good practices" which made them realise their interdependence, the river goddess appeared to them once more and made them become aware that they were from now on forming a family of 'river cousins'.

Photograph 1: Scene from the *River Cousins*, in which the river goddess appears to the main characters © Paul-Malo Winsback

Staging a unified sector

Beyond geographic criteria, the work involved in building consensus also required staging the participants' membership to a collective. A group photograph was then organised on the first day, and the facilitators invited all participants to congratulate themselves by clapping at the end of each session. But, apart from these active aspects, the idea of a collective was also materialised in certain objects. Each guest was welcomed with a name tag to be worn around the neck, a conceptual document and a polo shirt bearing the SADC logo and the mention '8th RBO Workshop', which several participants wore during the workshop or on other occasions to mark their membership to the group. In this regard, we were able to observe, several months later, that an agent was wearing his polo shirt daily, in his office in South Africa. During the workshop, the name tag worn around the neck was the subject of much attention by those participants less familiar with the regional order, when hunting for recommended interlocutors. To the young, easily identifiable white foreigner with a distinctive accent, and for whom this was the first regional event, participants looked on curiously, before lifting an eyebrow denouncing their lack of interest, after reading the mention 'University of Toulouse'.

The various presentations were about highlighting successful regional projects from which lessons could be learned, and about self-administered statements of success. In the various conclusions of participants, politics was generally perceived as a source of conflicts surpassed by technique. With a view to inciting his counterparts to show great skills of persuasion, a participant said: "We need to speak the simple language of politicians", in order to convince decision-makers that a purely technical guideline would lead them to overcome their disagreements. This political foil was only questioned on the sidelines and by those agents closest to government posts. A representative justified to the gallery the success of an institution: "Probably this is driven by the fact that [it] involves issues of national sovereignty that cannot be left, solely, in the hands of technocrats." During informal discussions, the problems and disagreements were all, however, designated as "political" and were symbolically brushed aside.

Building consensus around central agents

In addition to praising common membership to a diverse region and to staging consensus through nature and technology, building the group also goes through strict time management. The aim of the already very full programme, was to ensure that the most prominent agents (*infra*) spoke and, as such, to show Southern African unity. For the organisers and facilitators, i.e. those who gave the floor, respecting the programme was a requirement that met the demands of sponsors as well as national administrations. By following the programme to the letter, organisers "considered issues from all angles", thereby preventing real dissensus from taking place and disposing of any potential conflict. Potential questions or challenges from the audience were thus systematically counterbalanced by the intervention of the agent in charge of organising exchanges, either by proposing that a prominent expert replies ("This is a really good question, but maybe X could reply to that?"), or by giving the microphone to another participant without the question being answered.

Between these periods of presentation, many breaks and meals offered participants opportunities to interact, the main reason for the workshop. The opening ceremony, on the first day, was immediately followed by a 30-minute tea break to enable participants to meet around a buffet in an adjoining room. Each half-day was interspersed with at least one period favouring more informal exchanges, and several participants extended their lunch break to meet in a select group, discuss their work and tell personal stories. On the evening of the first day, a cocktail party in a garden hidden from view offered participants another opportunity to meet. In the course of the evening, a few hours after participants left one another at the bar, where several were regular customers (the more prominent agents in particular), those who stayed at the hotel met for breakfast. For the newcomers, each break was a direct opportunity to exchange business cards to introduce themselves. Moreover, at the end of the workshop, a USB key was supplied to participants containing the documents presented, as well as an alphabetical list of all attending agents with their identities and contact details (email addresses as well as work and private telephone numbers) to facilitate subsequent interactions. Building the community and encouraging exchanges also came with a specific management of the meeting space, which had its own hierarchies and divisions.

Learning and taking one's place in the group space

During the workshop, agents played different roles, which corresponded to the idea they had of the group's expectations (Goffman 1956, 22-23). It is with this in mind that the meeting space must be observed (Cayouette-Remblière, Lion and Rivière 2019): the way agents appropriated the venue space reveals the image they had of their own position within the group. In the participants' actions as in the physical organisation of the venue, the RBO Workshop presented hierarchies within the regional order (Löw 2015), between a sense of distinction and a claimed relaxed attitude.

Organising the venue space

To illustrate the role of the venues and their layout, we will rely on the drawing of the main rooms where official exchanges took place (see Figure 2 above). The meetings of the workshop mainly took place in the hotel building

dedicated to large forums and meetings. Designed to host several events at the same time and to be adjustable, the organisation of the rooms matched the standards usually applied to international conference centres. At the request of the organisers, three venues were used: an exhibition space where official institutions could organise presentation stands, a large main room where debates could be hosted, and two adjacent rooms where meetings could be held (only one appears on the drawing, i.e. the one we had access to). This distinction was an attempt – presumed by the organisers – at rationalising exchanges, by allocating a specific function to each space. The main room was the venue for the plenary meeting, while the exhibition room catered for more informal interactions. Information stands offered documentation which was above all an opportunity for discussions (displayed reports and prospectus were little consulted on site, or with detachment). The fact that the buffet was located in the middle of the room made moving around easier, especially for agents moving from one group to another. The adjoining meeting rooms were supposed to cater for the activities of interest groups, and therefore to facilitate future contacts.

Photograph 2: Plenary meeting during the first day of the workshop
© Paul-Malo Winsback

The layout of the venue was sober and classic. A small bouquet had been placed on each one of the twenty tables of the main room, with a headset for interpretation, a microphone, a small desk pad, a pen and a water bottle placed in front of each one of the six chairs surrounding the tables. But with no seating arrangement, where participants sat depended a lot on implied knowledge that, yet, was not random. Free to move around, participants sat together according to the sub-group they belonged to. The more important representatives of the SADC water sector sat in the front. Among them were the executive secretaries of regional basin organisations, experts who were not civil servants (consultants, representatives of international organisations, etc.), as well as members highly committed to projects of regional dimensions, often distinguished by their seniority. The rest of the audience gathered national civil servants and representatives from the ministries of water affairs, which are not as close to the SADC water sector. Forming a separate group, consultants and sponsors sometimes sat in the middle of the room in order to meet national representatives and, in this way, reinforce their professional networks. However, despite these attempts, the majority of consultants and sponsors whose status is uncertain (because their relationships to regional institutions change regularly), although still structural in that they fit into the regional order (because they are omnipresent in the region), all ended up sitting at the same table, on the right-hand side of the room.

Taking one's place

The specific features of the venues offered an opportunity to make original observations. Indeed, the badly-lit and air-conditioned room did not help participants to concentrate. Hearty meals and the density of the presentations plunged most of those present into a state of lethargy, or made them lack attention. During exchanges, it was easy to observe yawning, chewing movements and finger tapping on the tables – even snoring was heard during a similar event the following year. Even before identifying the different roles of the agents, it was in fact possible to distinguish how important their office was in the regional hierarchy, by how intensely they paid attention. Those agents most involved in the SADC interplay, were sitting mostly in the first rows so as to be able to intervene and walk easily to the platform. The attention then decreased as one scanned the room towards the back, where participants could be seen fiddling with their cell phones and laptops, or showing signs of sleepiness. Without it being explicit, a participant's seating choice reflected a form of incorporation of the group's routines by its members, and depended, among others, on a participant's office and seniority. For this

reason, those who considered themselves to be less legitimate sat at the back, as opposed to those more legitimate at the front. It can therefore be said that regional hierarchies were reflected physically.

The material expression of hierarchies was not, however, a matter for the subconscious only. In addition to the rationalisation of exchanges according to a standardised format, space management was indeed thought through to push forward the most prominent participants. This led to identifying which associations mixed with one another as well as their hierarchies, and led to showing who was accepted as an authority, and where that authority came from. On the platform of the main room, or in the more select panels in the meeting rooms, prominent agents from the group succeeded one another, adopting an almost professorial attitude. Their names and the institutions to which they were attached were displayed on small easels, and were also projected on two side screens for more visibility. The distinction between panel and public helped, as such, to integrate authoritative statements, or at least to legitimate certain stances.

The position of authority was reinforced by many signs of acknowledgement. Even though all speakers introduced themselves, facilitators highlighted the obvious prominence of some participant ("There is no need for me to introduce him"), while putting forward their closeness ("X and I go way back and I am grateful for every working opportunity we've had."). Every speaker sought to salute the other and to tell anecdotes, thereby showing their integration in the SADC water sector. These words often came with much hugging and kissing, pats on the back and other manifestations of physical closeness aiming at breaking distances, but did not cut across hierarchies despite their euphemisation.

A game of hierarchical sociabilities

As already tackled in the second section, the workshop aimed at bringing together a collective that required spatial management, i.e. where the organisation as well as the behaviour of participants were concerned, which in turn revealed certain hierarchies. For this reason, the unfocused attention of the less prominent agents was above all evidence that the main part of the meeting was "elsewhere": more than the presentations, of importance was the acknowledgement of the agents "who matter" within the SADC water sector, so as to be able to subsequently create and maintain relations with them.

Showing it

The way the venue was organised thus made it possible to push forward the more prominent agents, as well as the main speakers. Participants went to them during the many breaks in order to exchange business cards, but also to show their closeness. The ambiguity of the bonding signs (in this case hugging or shaking hands, among others) could in fact be voluntary (Goffman 1971, 196): they cost little and made it possible to convey a certain closeness for, if participants wanted to be part of it, they had to show it. In fact, those who expressed themselves in full view of others came out of it reinforced, with an aura of legitimacy. Known and recognised by others, they could embody the spirit of harmony and shared positions.

During the discussions around the buffets, it was considered polite to evoke one element remembered from a presentation, and to stick to it, while other participants who joined the small discussion circle agreed and, at times, evoked an anecdote they thought corresponded to the main subject of conversation. Of importance then was to keep a straight face and show seriousness and respectability, to show that the meeting was not only a moment of sociability, but a work meeting. Such a performance pretended to ignore that sociability was in fact part of what was expected from the members of the SADC water sector. Each agent was indeed responsible for maintaining good relationships with everyone, i.e. with sponsors to guarantee access to funds and the continuity of the programmes, with representatives from other member countries to obtain their support during multilateral discussions, and with the members of the regional administration and transnational organisations to enable exchanges and future contracts.

However, not everyone was treated the same way, and the more prominent the agents – or the institutions they represented – the more they showed indifference. Chatting was more frequent between those who already knew one another through repeated exchanges and shared

experiences, but also from the way they had mastered and incorporated the rules of sociability, and the acknowledgement of their own position in the regional government space. This was the case, in particular, of the representative of a key sponsor who had arrived late, on the morning of the first day of the workshop. He spent the first part of the meeting leaning back on his chair, one hand on the back of the seat next to him, and the other in his pocket, gazing in the distance. It was only during the tea break that he went towards the others, and that the others came to him because he was known and recognised as a key player in the water sector.

Sponsors less in control of the regional interplay than what appears

Apart from the management of the venue space and interactions between participants, the workshop programme also showed symbolic hierarchies and the articulation of sociabilities in the regional order. After the opening ceremony, the keynote address was entrusted to an agent mandated by a sponsor. In his address, the speaker encouraged participants to abandon former regional policies on integrated water resources management (IWRM), so as to adopt a more networked approach that would make it possible to increase capital investment. During the two days of the workshop, facilitators regularly gave him the floor, and sometimes even when he was not part of the panels. He also intervened from time to time by interrupting agents talking in the microphone. *A contrario*, someone who wanted to talk twice was thanked, but was not given the floor the second time, while another was congratulated for his "very good question" without an answer being actually offered.

On examining these formal discussions, it could be tempting to assume that the regional order was actually only regulated by the sponsors, gathered under the title of International Co-operating Partners. Yet, pushing forward the mandated agent who, incidentally, was relatively new on the scene and little integrated into the SADC water sector, was in stark contrast with his relative isolation when he was not making presentations. While the impression of a collective subservient to the donor-driven agenda – as censured by certain observers – is not unfounded, the relations maintained between agents show an order which is underlain by external and internal hierarchical demands, but which did not prevent a group of local agents from coming together and supporting the region. Standing across from the comings and goings of sponsors, is a group of regional agents who are gathered together by shared histories, characteristics and habits formed in the long term. Together they form the "gatekeepers" of the water sector in the region, and represent interested parties in the formulation, execution and assessment of each one of its projects.

Systems and languages

These gatekeepers are not alone in intervening in the region, and the entire subcontinent cannot be presented, however, as a unified space. Despite the translation services imposed by the operating rules of the SADC, the languages spoken influence where participants stand in the implicit hierarchy. In a meeting where most exchanges take place in English, French-speaking participants express their dissatisfaction every now and again, owing to the absence of French speakers, and are renown for not mixing with the other tables. The situation is relatively similar where Portuguese speakers are concerned, although some of them compensate for their minority position by being highly involved in the water sector of the region. These personal and professional networks have actually led them to also learn English, thereby speeding up their integration into the group, which they also use as a career opportunity. These participants recognise one another and are grateful for the unobtrusive and institutionalised environment of the SADC water sector.

Rooted in an institutional order with a strong history, with its agents and its own representations, the water sector of the SADC is a resource government which does not often showcase itself, in that it is underlain by multiple sovereignties. The RBO Workshop cycle, which includes the workshop held in Windhoek, fits into this institutional whole it helps to constitute and maintain. By staging and building consensus, by projecting this order in the physical space of meetings and by organising sociabilities, this event is the structuring rite of a regional interstitial and discreet order.

Acronyms

When they exist, acronyms and their translations appear also in French and Portuguese.

- IWRM: Integrated Water Resources Management
  (*GIRE: Gestion intégrée des ressources en eau; GIRH: Gestão Integrada de Recursos Hídricos*)
- LIMCOM: Limpopo Watercourse Commission
  (*Commission du cours d'eau du Limpopo; Comissão do Curso de Água do Limpopo*)
- OKACOM: Permanent Secretariat for the Okavango River Basin Commission
  (*Commission permanente du bassin de l'Okavango; Comissão Permanente das Águas da Bacia Hidrográfica do Rio Okavango*)
- ORASECOM: Orange-Senqu River Commission
  (*Commission du fleuve Orange-Senqu*)
- RBO: River Basin Organisations
  (*Organismes de bassin; Organizações de bacia*)
- SADC: Southern African Development Community
  (*Communauté de développement d'Afrique australe; Comunidade de Desenvolvimento da África Austral*)
- ZAMCOM: Zambezi River Basin Commission
  (*Commission du cours d'eau du Zambèze; Comissão do Curso de Água do Zambeze*)

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« *They are the gatekeepers!* »
Ethnographie d'une rencontre du gouvernement régional de l'eau d'Afrique australe

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Résumé

Les 8 et 9 mai 2018, au début de l'hiver namibien, le *Safari Hotel* de Windhoek accueille le *RBO Dialogue,* l'atelier des organisations de bassins transfrontaliers d'Afrique australe. L'ethnographie de cette rencontre permet de révéler des jeux régionaux structurels repris dans l'article. Cet événement est en effet un rendez-vous de premier plan au sein d'un ensemble institutionnel dense. Son objet est de permettre de construire du consensus, une entreprise qui se retrouve dans la gestion qui est faite de l'espace lors de la rencontre et qui témoigne de l'intériorisation des rôles de chacun. Ce moment offre, de fait, l'opportunité d'incarner physiquement l'ordre régional et d'en distinguer les membres dans leurs fonctions et leurs rangs.

Mots-clés : experts ; SADC ; performance ; rite ; groupe

Introduction

Les 8 et 9 mai 2018, au début de l'hiver namibien, le luxueux *Safari Hotel* de Windhoek accueille le *RBO Dialogue,* l'atelier des organisations de bassins transfrontaliers (RBO). Pendant deux jours, environ 170 fonctionnaires nationaux, internationaux, ainsi que de nombreux experts, se retrouvent à cette grand'messe administrative des eaux d'Afrique australe. En observant cette rencontre, il est possible de comprendre certains des phénomènes sociaux en jeu dans la construction et la cohésion d'un groupe de personnes qui, ensemble, forment un cadre de gouvernement régional de l'eau.

Pour ne pas se restreindre à une description formelle, l'ethnographie est ici enrichie d'un appareil théorique dont il faut évoquer les bases à grands traits. Nous formulons en effet l'hypothèse que l'événement permet aux participants de se mettre en scène comme un collectif, ce qui rend visible par la même occasion les règles spécifiques de cet ordre institutionnel régional. Ce postulat performatif (l'idée que le groupe existe en partie par sa formulation) s'appuie sur l'étude du contexte institutionnel et des interactions entre les participants (Tambiah 1979). Pour cela, nous mobilisons les travaux sur les rites sociaux de deux sociologues classiques, ceux d'Émile Durkheim et d'Erving Goffman. Avec le premier, nous pouvons observer la rencontre comme une célébration qui permet de construire, stabiliser et entretenir un ordre social en le célébrant – ce qu'il désigne dans le cas religieux comme un « culte positif » (Durkheim [1912] 1990, 494). Mais si la rencontre de Windhoek est

l'un de ces moments où s'incarne le groupe régional de l'eau, il ne faut pas y faire abstraction des interactions plus banales en apparence. Goffman nous permet à cet égard d'entrer plus subtilement dans les plis du social et de prendre au sérieux les rites d'interactions, ces « signes du lien » (*tie-signs*) qui identifient les rapports des uns avec les autres et témoignent de la façon avec laquelle ils ont intériorisé les règles du monde dans lequel ils évoluent, et avec lequel ils interagissent (Goffman 1956; 1971).

Face à ce groupe *a priori* disparate de fonctionnaires, hauts fonctionnaires, ingénieurs, bailleurs, consultants et autres experts, il pourrait être tentant de ne voir que des divisions entre représentants d'États souverains. La rencontre ne serait qu'un moment formel de discussion autour d'une forme de gouvernance régionale de l'eau douce. On y échangerait sur les politiques avec détachement, et les conséquences de ces discussions ne seraient que minimes, dans la mesure où les décisions finales sur ces politiques reviennent aux autorités exécutives et parlementaires concernées. Pourtant, la mise en place d'un ordre institutionnel de l'eau douce en Afrique australe, parcouru de hiérarchies propres et de structures plus ou moins souples, incite à adopter le terme de gouvernement. Car, bien loin du postulat d'égalité entre les participants intrinsèque à l'idée de gouvernance, le terme de « gouvernement » permet de comprendre des différences de statuts aux conséquences importantes dans l'élaboration des cadres politiques communs (Hermet 2004). La façon avec laquelle est organisé l'événement ainsi que les interactions entre participants sont révélatrices des règles qui parcourent ce groupe de l'eau de la SADC (Communauté de développement d'Afrique australe, en anglais *Southern African Development Community*). Par l'observation, nous avons tenté de repérer ces normes implicites en jeu dans les sociabilités (relations de travail et mondanités) qui peuvent parfois donner l'illusion d'un effacement des hiérarchies – ou, au contraire, de leur gel sous le poids des souverainetés.

Notons aussi que, sur le plan méthodologique, le moment de cette observation a marqué le début d'un terrain de thèse, alors que les contours de la recherche n'étaient que très flous. Le regard encore relativement vierge, étonné de tout et absolument étranger au lieu comme aux personnes, n'était alors pas encore trop contraint par des questions restrictives. Dans un événement somme toute relativement solennel, la méthode postulait que l'observation du trivial permet de comprendre les impensés. L'objet de cet article n'est pas de faire une analyse textuelle ou un résumé, même critique, des déclarations qui ont été faites à Windhoek. Si ces discours permettent de mieux saisir la place des agents (de connaître leurs prises de positions et leur agenda officiel), ils ne renvoient qu'à une surface choisie, ce qu'ils offrent d'eux-mêmes et de l'institution qu'ils représentent. Aussi, deux ans plus tard, et partant d'une enquête mêlant ethnographie, entretiens biographiques et consultation d'archives, la confrontation de cette observation avec d'autres matériaux permet une prise de recul et la mise en évidence de certaines tendances régionales. Le *RBO Dialogue* de Windhoek, représentatif de pratiques récurrentes, est ainsi une fenêtre d'observation sur le secteur de l'eau de la SADC.

À la manière d'un compte rendu problématisé et réflexif (Delsaut 2020), nous proposons ce retour ethnographique en quatre temps. En premier lieu, il sera nécessaire de présenter le contexte historique et institutionnel de cette rencontre, et en quoi elle s'inscrit dans la continuité d'autres événements similaires impliqués dans la constitution d'un groupe régional de gouvernement de l'eau. L'organisation de l'événement traduit, ensuite, le souci de créer du consensus par l'évocation de référents communs. À partir de cette entreprise de construction collective, il est possible dans un troisième temps de revenir sur la gestion de l'espace de la rencontre, qui aide à distinguer les rôles des uns et des autres au sein de cet ensemble régional. Pour finir, la mise en avant de certains participants plutôt que d'autres témoigne des hiérarchies propres à cet espace de gouvernement, enchevêtré dans différents ordres institutionnels.

Le rendez-vous d'un secteur de l'eau institutionnalisé

Un secteur qui émerge à l'époque coloniale et s'institutionnalise après les libérations

Avant de décrire le *RBO Dialogue*, il est nécessaire de présenter brièvement le paysage institutionnel de la région et son histoire (voir aussi Maupin 2013). En effet,

les interactions sur l'eau entre les États d'Afrique australe sont régulières et réglementées, et ce, dès leur création. Les nombreux contentieux frontaliers mènent ces administrations à formaliser leurs échanges au cours du XX^{e} siècle par des comités bilatéraux qui, pour certains, subsistent encore. Préfiguration d'accords plus vastes, des accords régionaux généraux sont parfois signés entre autorités coloniales, par exemple sur les eaux partagées entre l'Afrique du Sud et le gouvernement portugais dans les années 1960. En effet, les deux puissances sont à cheval sur des bassins partagés dans le sud du continent autour du fleuve Kunene — partagé entre l'Angola colonisé par le Portugal et l'actuelle Namibie, alors sous la coupe de l'Afrique du Sud – et de l'Inkomati-Maputo, où l'Union sud-africaine est positionnée en amont du bassin qui se déverse dans l'océan Indien, depuis le Mozambique sous domination de Lisbonne.

Dans un contexte d'apartheid et de guerres d'indépendance, un accord de partage des eaux est trouvé en 1964. Avant cette date, le Zambèze, plus grand fleuve de la région, fait même l'objet en 1948 d'une première tentative d'autorité commune proposée à tous les pays riverains par le *Central African Council* (sous houlette britannique). Au lendemain des indépendances et avec la création de la SADC en 1992, les interactions s'accélèrent et le développement des structures régionales formalise progressivement la configuration d'un cadre de gouvernement de l'eau général au sud du continent. L'institution d'intégration régionale est, de fait, conçue dès ses origines comme un point nodal de production, de traduction et d'échanges de politiques-cadres de l'eau où le maître-mot officiel est « coopération ».

Figure 1: Carte des principaux bassins partagés et des frontières politiques de la région SADC (SADC 2016, VIII)

Cet espace institutionnel est un lieu de production normative dense (textes juridiques, stratégies régionales, etc.). En 1995, un protocole de partage des eaux est établi pour y encadrer les échanges, avant d'être révisé en 2000. Ce texte est régulièrement cité comme un outil juridique d'avant-garde, du fait de sa défense d'une administration de l'eau par bassin transfrontalier. À la même période, le Conseil des ministres de la région décide la création d'une « unité de coordination sur l'eau » dont les bureaux sont d'abord installés à Maseru, au Lesotho, avant de déménager dans les locaux de la SADC centralisés à Gaborone, au Botswana). La « division Eau » – nom donné à cette entité – est garante du bon respect du protocole, et établit un plan d'action et une stratégie régionale de gestion des eaux. Ces textes non contraignants, revus tous les cinq ans, constituent une ligne directrice et des objectifs communs aux États de la SADC.

L'exécution et la mise au point de ces objectifs et programmes passent par un maillage institutionnel épais, au sein duquel les rencontres régulières facilitent la connaissance et reconnaissance des uns et des autres. Outre les rendez-vous ministériels, les haut-fonctionnaires de l'eau se retrouvent dans le WRTC (*Water Regional Technical Committee*) tandis que les bailleurs se réunissent au sein du WSRG (*Water Strategic Regional Committee*). Les rencontres du WRTC sont organisées par le GWPSA, le Partenariat global de l'eau en Afrique australe, une institution non gouvernementale qui est, en pratique, l'organe d'exécution principal de la « division Eau » de la SADC. À ceci s'ajoute l'ensemble des rencontres bilatérales (entre pays riverains) ainsi que des réunions entre pays partageant des cours d'eau, principalement autour des RBO (organismes de bassin, en anglais *River Basin Organisations*) : l'ORASECOM sur l'Orange-Senqu, l'OKACOM sur l'Okavango, la LIMCOM sur le Limpopo et la ZAMCOM sur le Zambèze.

Parmi toutes ces rencontres, deux rendez-vous incontournables ont lieu en alternance tous les deux ans, s'assurant ainsi d'au moins une rencontre annuelle de l'ensemble des représentants de la région : le *SADC Water Dialogue* qui rassemble les administrateurs régionaux de l'eau et le *RBO Dialogue*, qui se réunit autour des représentants des organes de bassins. Ces rendez-vous servent ainsi de rites de maintien (*maintenance rituals*) (Goffman 1971, 73) dont l'objectif est de rappeler de façon chronique l'existence de cette communauté et ainsi de la rendre pérenne.

Un ordre régional maintenu par des gardiens

Quelques jours après le *RBO Dialogue* de Windhoek en 2018, alors que je décris la scène à une chercheuse familière des politiques régionales, elle s'exclame : « *Yes! They were all there. They are the gatekeepers!* » Ces *gatekeepers* sont les hauts fonctionnaires qui autorisent les projets, les bailleurs qui octroient les fonds, les consultants qui exécutent les programmes régionaux. Derrière ce terme abstrait se cache un collectif qui gravite autour du secteur de l'eau de la SADC et qu'il est difficile de nommer, en partie car ses agents ne peuvent pas le faire eux-mêmes ouvertement, dans la mesure où ils se situent au carrefour de multiples souverainetés juridiques. Entre eux, la persistance des échanges et les liens juridiques créent une communauté de fait, qui est permise par des trajectoires personnelles et des propriétés sociales relativement similaires. De ce fait, ces *gatekeepers* sont les membres constitutifs les plus centraux de l'ordre institutionnel régional discret dont ils défendent les intérêts, dans un enchevêtrement complexe de loyautés.

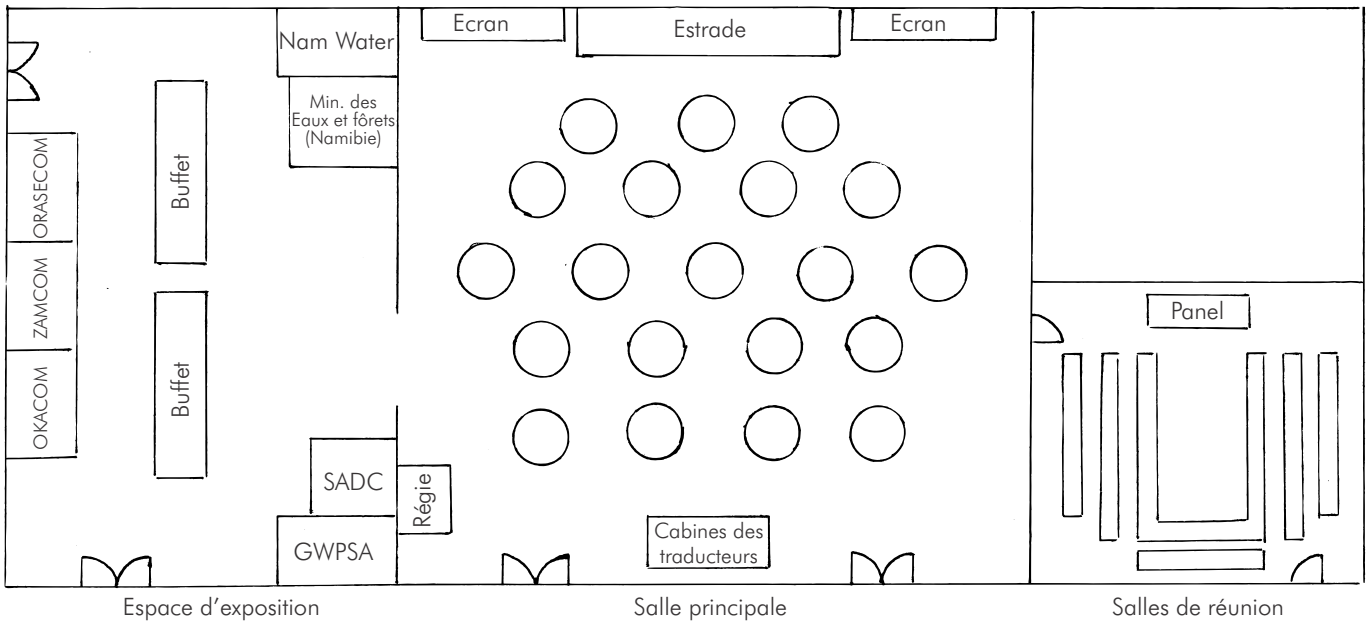

Figure 2: Croquis de l'organisation des salles principales du *RBO Dialogue* de Windhoek © Paul-Malo Winsback

Un secteur divisé en ordres de légitimation

Le secteur de l'eau de la SADC rassemble une multiplicité d'agents et institutions. Il est toutefois possible d'en identifier trois grandes catégories, qui constituent chacun un ordre de légitimation différent (c'est à dire un ensemble de motifs qui rendent ces agents légitimes à être membre du gouvernement régional).

- Le premier est celui du mandat administratif et politique, c'est-à-dire la force du droit : il s'agit pour l'essentiel des fonctionnaires nationaux et internationaux (représentants de ministères de l'eau, de la SADC, etc.).
- Le deuxième est celui des diplômes et de l'expertise, soit une légitimation technique : s'y retrouvent les spécialistes et consultants invités (bureaux de conseils, organisations internationales, etc).
- Le troisième est celui de l'expérience. Dit autrement, la présence et l'action de long terme dans les affaires régionales donnent du crédit et légitiment leur place : parmi eux se retrouvent des agents « historiques » qui, lorsqu'ils n'ont plus d'appartenance officielle, sont enregistrés comme des « *resource persons* ».

Ces trois ordres ne sont pas mutuellement exclusifs, et plusieurs agents les revendiquent tous avec succès. Les bailleurs de fonds sont, par exemple, à la charnière entre le premier et second ordre de légitimation car ils relèvent d'une légitimation juridique (représentants d'une administration nationale) et technique (ils gèrent les fonds et accompagnent l'exécution des projets). Mais, parce qu'il s'agit d'un espace institutionnel régional en construction, et parce que les institutions s'incarnent d'abord dans des personnes, il est possible de soulever l'hypothèse que le registre de l'expérience régionale est prédominant. Tel qu'il sera décrit plus loin, le représentant d'un bailleur de fonds de premier plan, pourtant fortement mis en avant lors des présentations, est relativement seul en dehors de discussions en assemblée plénière. Ici, le capital social des agents renforce leur position dans les hiérarchies symboliques du groupe.

Cet enchevêtrement s'explique par le passage ou l'appartenance à plusieurs institutions dans la région (administration nationale, organe de bassin, organisation de conseil, etc.). Précisons ici que la préparation du *RBO Dialogue* de Windhoek est assurée par l'État namibien en qualité d'hôte national, mais aussi par l'OKACOM (organisation de bassin du fleuve Okavango) et le GWPSA, au nom de la « division Eau » de la SADC. Et, si l'ordre protocolaire met en avant les autorités de Namibie, ce sont bien les institutions régionales qui sont au cœur de la rencontre, et c'est en elles et avec elles que se jouent cet entrelacement. Les agents du GWPSA sont en effet assimilés aux représentants de la Communauté australe, ce qui s'exprime dans l'agencement même des lieux (voir schéma) et dans les rôles de chacun : entre leurs stands accolés, l'agent qui représente la SADC est membre du GWPSA. Mais derrière cette interpénétration et outre un univers institutionnel bien établi aux rencontres régulières, cet événement est l'occasion d'un travail de construction d'un consensus régional.

Se rencontrer pour faire consensus

En faisant échanger les membres du secteur de l'eau de la SADC, l'un des objectifs des organisateurs est de construire une forme de consensus régional. À cet égard, les thèmes sont pensés pour être fédérateurs et peu propices aux controverses. Le *Dialogue* de Windhoek de 2018 porte ainsi sur les investissements stratégiques sur les bassins partagés tandis que la veille, lundi 7 mai, avait lieu un autre rendez-vous consacré au *gender mainstreaming*. Les deux jours qui suivent l'événement principal servent à réorganiser et synthétiser les discussions, afin de produire un document final qui sera soumis aux ministres de l'Eau des États de la SADC, un processus d'écriture pour aboutir à la formalisation d'une forme de position collective.

Mettre en scène une commune africanité

Le choix du lieu en lui-même traduit la construction d'un collectif à la fois volontairement, mais aussi au travers d'impensés. Si l'hôtel a été choisi, c'est avant tout parce qu'il offre les conditions pratiques imposées par les participants à la bonne exécution de la rencontre : des salles modulables, suffisamment vastes pour accueillir l'ensemble des participants dans un cadre élégant et pour recevoir des hauts fonctionnaires. L'ensemble des prestations offertes par ce lieu et son éloignement du centre-ville, qui contribue à préserver la tranquillité des échanges, justifient qu'il ait été choisi. Cependant, le complexe, conçu sur le modèle des *lodges* avec son large portail d'entrée séparé en deux par un abri et son gardien en uniforme, est imprégné d'évocations d'une certaine vision idéalisée du continent. L'endroit est grand et richement décoré, avec d'épais tapis au sol, de très hauts plafonds agrémentés de moulures et de lustres classiques. Dans le bâtiment réservé aux conférences, les décorations au mur et au sol figurent des représentations naturalisées et naturalisantes de la région : lions, éléphants et rhinocéros sur les tapis, tableaux de savanes et paysages désertiques…

Justifiée par la dimension régionale de l'événement, la célébration d'une certaine africanité ne se réduit pas à l'esthétique de l'hôtel. Plusieurs moments y sont consacrés, qui viennent rythmer les deux journées. Cela s'incarne, en premier lieu, dans les cérémonies d'ouverture et de fermeture, avec les hymnes de l'Union africaine, de la SADC et de la Namibie, pays hôte. Mais, avec moins de formalité, cela se traduit aussi par des danses traditionnelles namibiennes, auxquelles les participants, amusés et réjouis, réagissent en prenant des photographies avec leurs téléphones et tablettes. À un autre moment, l'union, qui semble aller de soi parce que régionale et organisée autour de ressources partagées, est mise en scène de façon appuyée par la représentation d'une courte pièce intitulée *River Cousins drama*, écrite et interprétée par des étudiants de l'université de Namibie. Cette pièce exalte, avec morale, les liens impensés (les personnages s'ignorent initialement) qui unissent les riverains du fleuve Cubango-Okavango. Trois personnes figurent chacune un pays du bassin (Angola, Botswana et Namibie). La déesse du fleuve arrive et leur explique que l'eau les relie. Il s'ensuit une succession de tableaux qui traitent chacun de ce qui ferait une bonne gestion des ressources. La critique vise ainsi deux personnes qui travaillent la terre en pratiquant le brûlis et qui défèquent en plein air. Un personnage leur apparaît pour leur signifier qu'ils ne peuvent pas brûler la terre et qu'ils doivent adopter des méthodes d'agriculture présentées comme plus « durables » ; un autre se manifeste pour leur dire qu'il faut creuser un trou dans la terre afin que leurs déjections ne contaminent pas les cours d'eau. En fin de représentation, du fait de ces « bonnes pratiques » qui leur font réaliser leur interdépendance, la déesse du bassin leur apparaît de nouveau et leur fait prendre conscience de la famille qu'ils forment désormais en tant que « *river cousins* ».

Photographie 1: Scène du *River Cousins drama*, où la déesse du fleuve apparaît aux personnages principaux © Paul-Malo Winsback

Mettre en scène un secteur uni

Au-delà du critère géographique, le travail de construction du consensus porte également sur la mise en scène de l'appartenance à un collectif. Une photographie de groupe est ainsi organisée le premier jour, et les facilitateurs et facilitatrices invitent les participants à s'auto-congratuler en applaudissant à l'issue de chaque session. Mais, en dehors de ces aspects actifs, l'idée de collectif se matérialise aussi dans certains objets. Chaque invité est ainsi accueilli avec une carte à son nom à porter autour du cou, une note conceptuelle et un polo flanqué du logo de la SADC et de la mention « *8th RBO workshop* », que plusieurs participants revêtent durant l'atelier ou à d'autres occasions pour marquer leur appartenance au groupe. Nous observerons ainsi plusieurs mois plus tard

qu'un agent le porte au quotidien dans son bureau en Afrique du Sud. Lors du *Dialogue*, la carte nominative portée autour du cou fait quant à elle l'objet d'une attention particulière des participants les moins familiers avec l'ordre régional, dans une chasse à l'interlocuteur de référence. Au jeune étranger facilement identifiable (blanc et à l'accent distinctif) et pour qui il s'agit du premier événement régional, les uns et les autres jettent des regards curieux avant de relever un sourcil marquant le manque d'intérêt face à la mention « *University of Toulouse* ».

Les différentes présentations portent sur la mise en avant de « succès » régionaux, d'où sont tirés des enseignements (« *lessons learned* ») et constats auto-administrés de réussites. Dans les conclusions des uns et des autres, le politique est généralement vu comme un poids et une source de conflits dépassés par la technique. « *We need to speak the simple language of politicians* » dit un participant pour inciter ses homologues à faire preuve de pédagogie, afin de convaincre les décideurs qu'un cadrage uniquement technique permettrait de surmonter leurs différends. Ce repoussoir politique n'est remis en cause qu'à la marge et par les agents les plus proches des postes de gouvernement. Un représentant justifie ainsi à la tribune la réussite d'une institution : « *Probably this is driven by the fact that [it] involves issues of national sovereignty that cannot be left, solely, in the hands of technocrats*. » Lors des discussions informelles, les troubles et mésententes sont cependant tous désignés comme « politiques » et balayés symboliquement d'une grimace et d'un revers de la main dans le vide.

Faire consensus autour d'agents centraux

Outre l'exaltation d'une commune appartenance à une région diverse et la mise en scène du consensus par la nature et la technique, la construction du groupe passe aussi par une rigoureuse gestion du temps. Le programme, chargé, vise à faire parler les agents les plus centraux (*infra*) et ainsi marquer l'unité du sud du continent. Pour les organisateurs et facilitateurs – celles et ceux qui distribuent la parole –, le respect du programme est une exigence pour répondre aux demandes des bailleurs comme des administrations nationales. En suivant à la lettre le programme, les organisateurs font le « tour de la question » sans que ne soit relevé de véritable *dissensus* tout en évacuant le conflit. Les éventuelles questions ou remises en cause de l'assistance sont ainsi systématiquement contrebalancées par l'intervention de l'agent en charge d'organiser les échanges, soit en proposant la réponse d'un spécialiste central (« *This is a really good question, but maybe X could reply to that?* »), soit en passant le micro à un autre participant sans qu'aucune réponse ne soit apportée à l'interrogation.

Entre ces moments de présentation, les nombreuses pauses et repas sont autant d'opportunités d'interaction, raison principale de la rencontre. À la cérémonie d'ouverture du premier jour succède immédiatement une « pause-thé » de trente minutes afin que les uns et les autres puissent se retrouver autour du buffet dans une salle attenante. Chaque demi-journée est entrecoupée d'au moins un temps permettant des échanges plus informels, et plusieurs étendent la pause-déjeuner pour s'y retrouver en petit comité, discuter de leur travail et se raconter des histoires personnelles. Le soir du premier jour, un cocktail dans un jardin à l'abri des regards offre aux participants un cadre supplémentaire de rencontre. Dans la soirée, quelques heures après s'être quittés au bar où plusieurs ont leurs habitudes (bien connues des agents les plus centraux), ceux qui logent à l'hôtel se retrouvent au petit déjeuner. Pour les nouveaux venus, chaque pause est l'occasion immédiate d'échanges de cartes de visite pour s'identifier. D'ailleurs, à l'issue de la rencontre, une clé USB est fournie avec les documents présentés, ainsi qu'un répertoire des agents présents avec leurs identités et leurs contacts (adresse courriel et téléphone – de travail et privé) pour faciliter les interactions ultérieures. Mais la construction du commun et l'incitation à l'échange s'accompagnent aussi d'une gestion spécifique de l'espace des échanges, qui n'est pas sans hiérarchies et divisions.

(Ap)prendre sa place dans l'espace

Dans cette rencontre, les agents jouent des rôles différents, qui correspondent à l'idée qu'ils se font des attentes du groupe (Goffman 1956, 22-23). C'est avec cela en tête que l'espace de la rencontre doit être observé (Cayouette-Remblière, Lion et Rivière 2019) : la façon dont les agents s'approprient cet espace est révélatrice de l'image qu'ils ont de leur propre position au sein du groupe. Dans les actes des participants comme dans

l'organisation physique des lieux, le *RBO Dialogue* met en scène les hiérarchies au sein de l'ordre régional (Löw 2015) entre un sens de la distinction et une décontraction revendiquée.

Organiser l'espace

Pour illustrer le rôle des lieux et de leur agencement, nous nous appuierons sur le croquis sommaire des salles où se jouent les échanges officiels (voir schéma *supra*). Les rencontres du *Dialogue* se déroulent essentiellement dans le bâtiment de l'hôtel dédié aux grands forums et réunions. Conçue pour pouvoir accueillir plusieurs événements en même temps et être modulable, l'organisation des pièces correspond aux standards des centres de conférences internationaux. À la demande des organisateurs, trois espaces peuvent être distingués : un lieu d'exposition où les institutions formelles disposent de stands de présentation, une vaste salle principale pour accueillir les débats, et deux salles de réunion attenantes (une seule figure sur le schéma, celle à laquelle nous avons eu accès). Cette distinction est une tentative assumée par les organisateurs de rationaliser les échanges, en attribuant à chaque espace une fonction spécifique. La salle principale est le lieu de rencontre plénière tandis que la salle d'exposition permet des interactions plus informelles. Des stands y offrent de la documentation qui est avant tout une occasion de discussions (les rapports et prospectus exposés ne sont que peu consultés sur place, ou alors avec détachement). Le buffet au milieu de la pièce autorise et facilite les déplacements, et ainsi la circulation des agents d'un groupe à un autre. Les salles de réunion attenantes sont censées permettre des activités par groupe d'intérêt, et donc faciliter les contacts futurs.

Photographie 2: Assemblée plénière lors du premier jour de la rencontre
© Paul-Malo Winsback

A priori, l'ordonnancement des lieux est aussi sobre que classique. Sur chacune des vingt tables de la salle principale sont disposés un petit bouquet, des casques de traduction, des microphones, un petit bloc-notes, un stylo et une bouteille d'eau devant chacune des six chaises qui l'entourent. Mais, sans plan de table, le placement des participants dépend pour beaucoup d'implicites qui ne sont pourtant pas hasardeux. Libres de leurs mouvements, les rapprochements s'opèrent en fonction de l'appartenance à certains sous-groupes. Les représentants les plus centraux du secteur de l'eau de la SADC prennent place devant. C'est parmi eux que se retrouvent les secrétaires exécutifs des organisations de bassin, les experts non fonctionnaires (consultants, représentants d'organisations internationales, etc.) et les membres les plus engagés sur des projets d'envergure régionale, distingués souvent par leur ancienneté. Le reste de la salle rassemble plutôt les fonctionnaires nationaux et représentants des ministères de l'Eau, qui font preuve de moins de proximité avec le secteur de la SADC. Formant un groupe à part, les consultants et les bailleurs s'assoient parfois en milieu de salle afin de rencontrer des représentants nationaux et de renforcer ainsi leurs réseaux professionnels. Toutefois, malgré cette tentative, la majorité de ces agents au statut incertain (parce que leurs liens aux institutions régionales changent régulièrement) mais structurel à l'ordre régional (parce qu'ils y sont omniprésents) finit par se rassembler à une même table, du côté droit de la pièce.

Prendre sa place

Ici, les propriétés spécifiques des lieux offrent une opportunité d'observation originale. En effet, la salle borgne et climatisée n'est pas des plus propices à la concentration. Les repas copieux et la densité des présentations plongent la plupart des personnes présentes dans une certaine léthargie ou les poussent à la distraction. Lors des échanges, il est facile d'observer des bâillements, des mouvements de mastication et des roulements de doigt sur les tables – des ronflements ont même discrètement retenti lors d'un autre événement similaire l'année suivante. Avant même d'avoir identifié

les différents rôles des agents, il est de fait possible de distinguer l'importance de leur fonction dans la hiérarchie régionale par l'intensité de leur attention. Les agents les plus impliqués dans le jeu de la SADC sont plutôt assis dans les premières rangées pour pouvoir intervenir et se déplacer vers l'estrade. L'attention décroît ensuite à mesure que l'on se dirige vers le fond de la pièce où l'on peut observer un usage récréatif des téléphones et des ordinateurs ou des signes de demi-sommeil. Sans que cela ne soit explicite, le choix du lieu pour s'asseoir traduit une forme d'incorporation des routines du groupe par ses membres et dépend, entre autres, de la fonction et de l'ancienneté. Ceux qui se considèrent les moins légitimes prennent de ce fait place à l'arrière, et les plus légitimes à l'avant. Les hiérarchies régionales se projettent ainsi physiquement.

Mais la traduction matérielle des hiérarchies n'est pas laissée au seul inconscient. Outre la rationalisation des échanges selon un format standardisé, la gestion de l'espace est en effet pensée pour mettre en avant les personnages les plus importants. Cela permet d'identifier les ordres qui se côtoient, leurs hiérarchies, et de montrer qui fait autorité et quelle est l'origine de cette autorité. Sur l'estrade de la salle principale, ou dans le *panel* plus restreint des salles de réunion, se succèdent les agents importants au sein du groupe, qui en tirent une posture quasi professorale. Leur nom et leur institution de rattachement sont exposés sur de petits chevalets, rendus plus visibles par leur projection sur deux écrans latéraux. La distinction entre le *panel* et le public aide de ce fait à intégrer les discours d'autorité, ou du moins à légitimer certaines prises de position.

La position d'autorité est renforcée par de multiples signes de reconnaissance. Bien que chaque orateur se présente, les facilitateurs et facilitatrices soulignent à quel point leur centralité va de soi (« *There is no need for me to introduce him* »), tout en mettant en avant leur proximité (« *X and I go a way back and I am grateful for every working opportunity we've had.* »). Chacun va chercher à saluer l'autre et à raconter des anecdotes qui témoignent d'une intégration dans le secteur de l'eau de la SADC. Ces propos sont accompagnés de multiples embrassades, claques dans le dos et autres manifestations de proximité physique qui visent à rompre les distances, mais n'effacent pas les hiérarchies malgré leur euphémisation.

Un jeu de sociabilités hiérarchisées

Comme il a été abordé en deuxième partie, le *Dialogue* vise à mettre en scène un collectif, et sa gestion dans l'espace – tant dans l'organisation que dans les comportements des participants – en révèle certaines hiérarchies. De ce fait, l'attention flottante des agents les moins centraux est surtout preuve que l'essentiel de la rencontre est « ailleurs » : plus que les présentations, l'important est la reconnaissance des agents « qui comptent » au sein du secteur de la SADC pour pouvoir ensuite créer et maintenir du lien avec eux.

Montrer que l'on en est

L'organisation des lieux permet donc de mettre en avant les agents les plus importants ainsi que les présentateurs principaux. Les participants vont alors se diriger vers eux lors des multiples pauses afin d'échanger des cartes, mais aussi de montrer leur proximité. L'ambiguïté des signes du lien (ici prendre dans les bras, serrer la main…) peut d'ailleurs être volontaire (Goffman 1971, 196) : à moindre coût, ils permettent de signifier une certaine proximité car, pour « en être », il faut aussi indiquer que l'on en est. Ceux qui s'expriment en tribune en sortent d'ailleurs renforcés d'une aura de légitimité. Connus et reconnus des autres, ils peuvent incarner l'esprit de concorde et les positions partagées.

Dans les discussions autour des buffets, il est ainsi de bon ton d'évoquer un élément retenu d'une présentation et de s'y rattacher, tandis que les autres participants au petit cercle de parole qui s'est formé acquiescent et évoquent par moment une anecdote qu'ils croient correspondre au sujet principal. L'important est ici de garder la face et de faire preuve de sérieux et de respectabilité en montrant que la rencontre n'est pas seulement un moment de sociabilité, mais une rencontre de travail. Cette performance prétend ignorer que cette sociabilité fait justement partie de ce qui est attendu des membres du secteur de l'eau de la SADC. Chaque agent est en effet chargé d'entretenir de bonnes relations avec tous : les bailleurs pour garantir l'accès aux fonds et la pérennité des programmes, les représentants des autres pays membres pour obtenir leur soutien lors de discussions multilatérales et les membres de

l'administration régionale et des organisations transnationales pour permettre des échanges et contrats futurs.

Toutes et tous ne sont cependant pas logés à la même enseigne, et le détachement est d'autant plus affiché que les agents, ou l'institution qu'ils représentent, sont centraux. Le bavardage est de fait plus fréquent entre celles et ceux qui se connaissent déjà par la répétition des échanges et des expériences partagées, mais aussi par la maîtrise et l'incorporation des règles, ainsi que la connaissance de leur propre position dans l'espace de gouvernement régional. C'est notamment le cas du représentant d'un bailleurs de fond de premier plan : arrivé en retard au matin du premier jour, il passe la première partie de la rencontre en arrière sur sa chaise, la main sur le dossier du fauteuil d'à côté, l'autre dans la poche, le regard au loin. Ce n'est qu'à la pause-café qu'il va vers les autres, et que les autres viennent vers lui parce qu'il est connu et reconnu comme un acteur essentiel.

Des bailleurs moins maîtres du jeu régional qu'il n'y paraît

Outre la gestion de l'espace et les interactions entre participants, le programme du *Dialogue* témoigne aussi des hiérarchies symboliques et de l'articulation des sociabilités dans l'ordre régional. Après la cérémonie d'ouverture, la première intervention (*keynote address*) est confiée à un agent mandaté par un bailleur de fonds. Dans son discours, il incite à abandonner les anciennes politiques régionales de gestion intégrée des ressources en eau (GIRE) pour se tourner vers une approche davantage « en réseau » qui permettrait d'accroître les investissements matériels. Lors des deux jours, les facilitateurs lui redonneront régulièrement la parole – parfois même sans qu'il ne fasse partie des *panels*. Il interviendra aussi de façon ponctuelle en interrompant les agents au micro. *A contrario*, quelqu'un qui veut s'exprimer deux fois sera remercié sans pouvoir le faire, et un autre sera salué d'un « *very good question* » sans qu'une réponse ne lui soit apportée.

Au regard de ces discussions formelles, il pourrait être tentant d'en présumer qu'il s'agit d'un ordre régi par les seuls donneurs, rassemblés sous le titre de Partenaires internationaux de coopération (*International Cooperating Partners*). Pourtant, cette mise en avant d'un agent, au demeurant relativement peu ancien et peu intégré au secteur de l'eau de la SADC, tranche avec son isolement relatif en dehors des moments de présentations. Si l'impression d'un collectif inféodé à l'agenda des bailleurs (*donor-driven agenda*) décrié par certains observateurs n'est pas infondé, les rapports qu'entretiennent les agents entre eux sont preuve d'un ordre qui, traversé d'exigences hiérarchiques externes et internes, n'empêche pas la constitution d'un ensemble d'agents solidaires et originaires de la région. Face aux va-et-vient des bailleurs se trouve un groupe d'agents régionaux réunis par des histoires communes, des propriétés sociales similaires et des habitudes collectives formées sur le temps long. Ensemble, ils forment les gardiens (« *gatekeepers* ») du secteur régional de l'eau, dont ils sont partie prenante pour chaque projet dans sa formulation, son exécution et son évaluation.

Des ordres et des langues

Ces gardiens ne sont cependant pas les seuls à agir, et l'ensemble du sous-continent ne peut pas être présenté comme un espace uni. Malgré les services de traduction imposés par les règles de fonctionnement de la SADC, les langues parlées influent sur les positionnements des participants dans la hiérarchie implicite. Dans une rencontre où les échanges se font très majoritairement en anglais, les francophones manifestent par moment leur mécontentement face à l'absence de locuteurs dans leur langue maternelle, et s'illustrent par leur non-intégration aux autres tables de discussion. La situation est relativement similaire pour les locuteurs lusophones, bien que certains compensent leur position minoritaire par une forte intégration au secteur régional de l'eau. Ces réseaux personnels et professionnels leur ont d'ailleurs aussi permis d'apprendre l'anglais, accélérant ainsi leur intégration au groupe qui sert alors d'opportunité de carrière. Ils se reconnaissent entre eux et sont reconnaissants envers un milieu à la fois discret et institutionnalisé.

Ancré dans un ordre institutionnel fort d'une histoire ancienne, avec ses agents et représentations propres, le secteur de l'eau de la SADC est un gouvernement des

ressources qui ne dit que peu son nom, parce qu'au croisement de multiples souverainetés. Les cycles de *RBO Dialogues*, dont la rencontre de Windhoek fait partie, s'inscrivent dans cet ensemble institutionnel qu'ils aident à constituer et maintenir. Par la mise en scène et la construction d'un consensus, la projection de cet ordre dans l'espace physique de la rencontre et l'ordonnancement des sociabilités, l'événement est un rite structurant d'un ordre régional interstitiel et discret.

Acronymes

Lorsqu'ils existent, les acronymes et leurs traductions figurent également en anglais et portugais.

- GIRE : Gestion intégrée des ressources en eau
  (IWRM : *Integrated Water Resources Management* ; GIRH : *Gestão Integrada de Recursos Hídricos*)
- LIMCOM : Commission du cours d'eau du Limpopo
  (*Limpopo Watercourse Commission* ; *Comissão do Curso de Água do Limpopo*)
- OKACOM : Commission permanente du bassin de l'Okavango
  (*Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission* ; *Comissão Permanente das Águas da Bacia Hidrográfica do Rio Okavango*)
- ORASECOM : Commission du fleuve Orange-Senqu
  (*Orange-Senqu River Commission*)
- RBO : Organismes de bassin
  (*River Basin Organisations* ; *Organizações de bacia*)
- SADC : Communauté de développement d'Afrique australe
  (*Southern African Development Community* ; *Comunidade de Desenvolvimento da África Austral*)
- ZAMCOM : Commission du cours d'eau du Zambèze
  (*Zambezi Watercourse Commission* ; *Comissão do Curso de Água do Zambeze*)

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The Building of the Massingir Dam in Southern Mozambique
The Relocation Process and its Consequences, 1975-1983

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Abstract

The construction of the Massingir dam along the Elephants River – a tributary of the Limpopo River – in southern Mozambique began in 1972, eight years after the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) had started an armed struggle to overthrow the Portuguese administration. On the 25th June 1975, the Frelimo party rose to power before the dam was complete. Frelimo's government took the responsibility to finalize the construction of the dam and to relocate the families living in areas demarcated for the reservoir. In February 1977, the government moved the villages affected by the filling of the reservoir to uplands located above the flood plain areas of the Elephants River.

This article seeks to exam the pitfalls of the late colonial period and the post independence policies in Mozambique; by focusing particularly on the resettlement process resulted from the filling of the Massingir dam reservoir, it explores how the rupture between the colonial administration and the introduction of the Frelimos' government policies affected the conclusion of the colonial projects. By doing this, the study documents experiences undergone by the down-river communities relocated in the north bank of the Elephants River, an area that in June 1930 was demarcated as a hunting reserve nº16 or *Coutada 16* in Portuguese. The study also analyses the impact of the resettlement process on local ecosystems and wildlife management practices by both governmental institutions and relocated families.

The research was part of my doctoral work and was conducted from 2012 to 2015. During this period, I visited libraries in Mozambique and South Africa and had access to literature about dams, conservation and development. Documents about development programs in the colonial districts of Alto Limpopo, Guijá and Massingir as well as documents about the construction of the Massingir dam were accessed at the National Directorate of Water of Mozambique (DNA) and the Mozambique Historical Archives (AHM). During the same period, I visited the Massingir district, where I met and interviewed people who went through the resettlement caused by the filling of the Massingir dam reservoir. Based on the analysis of both primary and secondary literature and findings from fieldwork, I argue that rather than contributing to an improvement in local communities' lives, the resettlement process caused by the filling of the Massingir dam reservoir contributed to worsen the living conditions of the local population who had hoped to find in independence a panacea for their freedom and a way to improve their lives.

Keywords: *agriculture; dam; communal village; hunting; hunting reserve; livestock; relocation; reservoir*

Introduction

From the later 1960s to the early 1970s, the Portuguese colonial authorities in Mozambique worked on detailed studies toward the construction of a hydroelectric dam along the Elephants River. In addition to the feasibility studies for the Project (dam wall, social infrastructures and the PowerStation), they also commissioned detailed studies on fertility of soils in the vast area located downstream of the dam site until the confluence of the Elephants and Shwinguedzi rivers. The studies revealed that the area had fertile soils for the development of irrigated agriculture. Accordingly, the construction of the dam would allow the development of irrigation schemes to benefit Portuguese settlers who would develop commercial farming and employ African labour from the neighbouring villages (Casimiro, J.F. & A.P. Veloso. 1969a; Casimiro, J.F. & A.P. Veloso. 1969b).

In August 1971, the Portuguese government granted the construction of the Massingir dam to a Portuguese company known as *Tâmega Consôrcio Lda* (Moçambique: Portaria nº413 - 06/8/1971). In 1972, *Tâmega Consôrcio Lda* started the development of infrastructures that hosted workers involved in the building of the dam. The infrastructure development work gave rise to a modern village in a remote rural area known as Tiovene. As a direct consequence of the infrastructural improvements made at Tiovene, the headquarters of the Massingir district moved from the remote rural village of Mavodze on the north bank of the Elephants River to Tiovene, 7 kilometers south of the dam site (Amós Matebula, interview by author, Mavodze, January 24, 2014).

The Portuguese also planned to resettle the upriver cultivators living in the area reserved for the dam reservoir in new villages that would be established 10 km downstream of the dam wall, namely Marrenguele, Chinhangane and Chibotana. About 1,700 people living in the villages of Massingir Velho and Mavodze in the north bank of the Elephants valley and 1,275 people from the villages of Canhane and Cubo on the south bank were to be relocated in the above-mentioned villages (AHM-CNAC, Cx. 71, 1982). After their relocation, the Portuguese administration would embark in other programs to relocate communities living in the village of *Coutada 16* to free the area for conservancy and protection of fauna (Simeão Ngovene, interview by author, Massingir Velho, January 6 2012).

Creating new villages within the hunting reserve or *Coutada 16*

On the 25th June 1975, Frelimo government came to power and subsequently took over the responsibility to complete the dam and relocate the downriver communities. Frelimo adopted a social, economic and development policy for Mozambique that differed from its colonizer. Whereas, in the colonial state's scheme, Africans would have been the ones cajoled to either relocate or flee their homes, under the new Frelimo government, it was ironically the Portuguese technicians and government civil servants that did not agree with Frelimo's policies and were made to flee. This situation prevented Frelimo officials from learning from the colonial government staff about colonial development projects for the area. Lack of qualified staff to implement the dam project as effectively as the colonial state had intended resulted in mistakes made during the completion of the dam wall, limiting the dam capacity to produce electricity and resettlement of affected communities in a hunting reserve (Amós Matebula, interview by author, Mavodze, January 24, 2014).

Analysis of data collected during fieldwork suggests that, during the planning for the relocation of populations affected by the filling of the dam reservoir, it seems that Frelimo made limited efforts to understand the polity, social organization and modes of production of the displaced populations in the Massingir region. Subsequently they were not able to capture the significant strengths to apply lessons to the new social and development projects. Additionally, when Frelimo came to power, the social infrastructures (roads, markets, hospital, schools, water pumps, irrigations schemes, etc.) which were part of the Massingir dam project to benefit Portuguese settlers and the resettled communities had not yet been built. Thus, the party had to start the resettlement program from scratch (i.e. choose the area for resettlement, survey it and build the infrastructure). This situation was particularly difficult because the party lacked the financial wherewithal to complete the project and qualified staff to undertake specific studies on

suitability of land for agriculture and pasture in the new resettlement areas (Amós Matebula, interview by author, January 24, 2014).

The lack of clarity regarding the conditions that the displayed families would find in the new resettlement area (fertile soils and social infrastructures) affected the way they negotiated the resettlement program with Frelimo officials. Most often, they demanded to see real assets such as irrigation infrastructures downstream of the dam and allocation of land in the irrigated areas before moving. Despite holding negotiations for more than two years (1975-76), there was no progress in the resettlement program and people continued to live on their land, despite the warning given by both colonial and Frelimo's officials that their land would be filled by water to become a reservoir (Manuela Valoi, interview by author, Mavodze, October 26, 2014).

In late 1976, the assembling of the floodgates of the Massingir dam signalled the completion of its construction. In the following year, the Massingir dam would start the filling of the reservoir to help to regulate floods in the Lower Limpopo and enable the development of agriculture in its irrigated areas (Sobrinho, A, 1981). Due to time pressure and the limited capacity of the Frelimo government to undertake civic work to convince the communities to move to areas located downstream , the government had no other option but to ask the communities' representatives for their own options for relocations. The representatives living on the north bank of the Elephants valley used this opportunity to suggest to Frelimo officials their relocation to upland regions above the floodplains, in *Coutada 16*, rather than moving downstream (Amós Matebula, interview by author, Mavodze, January 24, 2014).

Without carrying out a critical analysis of this resettlement option, the Frelimo government agreed with this proposal, despite the consequences in terms of people's safety (wildlife conflict) and livelihoods availability (agriculture and cattle keeping), and the impacts on local ecosystems and wildlife conservation. In the late 1976, the government rushed to mobilize machinery (bulldozers and tractors) to clear the areas for the establishment of new villages and to open the paths that would be used by trucks for the transport of goods and people to the new villages.

Coincidently, the planning for the relocation of families displaced by the construction of the Massingir dam took place in February 1976, after the 8th Session of

Figure 1: Map of the former hunting reserve nº 16 or *Coutada 16*, now Limpopo National Park – Mozambique. Source: Ministry of Tourism of Mozambique: LNP, 2003, p. 13.

Frelimo Central Committee where they debated on the social and economic policies to be implemented for the development of the countryside in Mozambique. Frelimo members present at this meeting agreed that the country had to go through a process of socialization of the countryside to allow the development of the remote rural areas. This policy entailed radical transformations of the economic mode of production and evolutions of the socio-political and territorial organization of the countryside. The cornerstone of the policy was based on the development of communal villages or *aldeias comunais*. Frelimo government expected to use communal villages to bring the dispersed rural population into modern rural villages where it would build social and economic infrastructures. Furthermore, the population was encouraged to work on people's farms, state agro-industrial enterprises and cooperatives (Araújo, M. 1988).

In late 1976, *Tamega Consôrcio Lda* cleared the land for the new villages in *Coutada 16* and Frelimo officials urged the displaced families to build their houses in blocks known as *quarteirões*. The *quarteirões* comprised several units of 10 houses headed by a chief (*chefe de 10 casas)*. A unit of several blocks constituted a *bairro* or neighbourhood and a unit of several *barrios* formed a communal village. The first families that went to build new homesteads in the new communal villages were given 10 to 15 zinc sheets for the roofs of their houses, depending on the sizes of their households. Until the early 1977, Frelimo government officials had managed to create four communal villages, two on the north bank of the Elephants River (Massingir Velho and Mavodze villages) and the other two on the south bank (Canhane and Cubo) to relocate communities removed from the Elephants river (AHM. CNAC, 1979. Cx. AC 71).

Moving to new communal villages in *Coutada 16*

In early 1977, the southern Mozambican region witnessed the passage of the cyclone Emilie that caused atmospheric changes and above-normal rainfall and floods. The heavy rains in the Massingir region in February 1977 resulted in quick filling of the reservoir, only 11 days (Sobrinho, A. 1981). The water quickly sprawled in the riverine villages leaving them totally

Figure 2: Massingir dam

inundated, thus compelling the populations to leave quickly the area and to escape to the upland regions. The beginning of the filling up of the dam was a surprise to many families who were still starting to build their houses in the new villages in *Coutada 16*. Furthermore, even the households that had already built their houses had not yet moved to their new homes (Alina Simango, interview by author, Mavodze, October 26, 2014).

The removal of the population from the Elephants valley to the new communal villages in *Coutada 16* occurred whilst most of the families were yet to start the harvesting of maize from their fields. Due to the rapid filling up of the reservoir, the affected families hastened to move to the new villages without having finished the harvest of their maize. In the new villages, they depended on foodstuffs distributed by the government, which, quite often, were not enough for their survival. Food insecurity and hunger were some of the consequences of the displacement process. People's accounts in this regard indicate that, in most of the new villages' households, bush meat was the alternative food for survival. The area also lacked physical infrastructure needed for the population's daily life such as roads, schools, hospitals, markets, etc. Moreover, the main rivers of the area were flowing far from the communal villages, which made the families rely on water distributed by a government tanker truck that most often was not enough for their consumption, bathing and cooking. The resettled families had to rely on water puddles formed during the rainy season near their villages and most often, the families claimed suffering constantly from diarrhoea and other stomach diseases (Manuela Valoi, interview by author, Mavodzi, October 26, 2014).

The establishment of the poorly planned communal villages, with little or no consultation with the people who were meant to be the beneficiaries of these new postcolonial policies, rather than improving the living conditions of the local communities, tended to create conditions that deepened people's levels of poverty. People interviewed in the Massingir region recorded that soon after their relocation in the communal villages in *Coutada 16*, life was much harder than during the colonial period. They argued that their removal from Elephants valley made them lose the fertile alluvial soils where they grazed their cattle, where they were farming and producing enough crops to eat all year round, even being able to sell part of their production to get money to pay for the colonial hut taxes and to buy goods for their families. However, such natural conditions did not exist in the new communal villages, which made agricultural pursuits a daunting exercise (Simião Ngovene, interview by author, MassingirVelho, Jul 6, 2012).

Development of agriculture and livestock keeping inside communal villages in *Coutada 16*

Coutada 16 has a semi-arid climate and savanna-like environment. The soils are poor and not suitable for farming. In general, rains in the area occurred from November to February and the average of rainfall in the region is about 400 mm a year. Far from the main rivers, Shingwedzi and the Elephants, agriculture is risky. Data collected and analysed by COBA indicate that every month of the year, the potential evapotranspiration exceeds the precipitation, which results in the water deficit for the practice of agriculture. In fact, excluding the alluvial soils of the floodplains of Shingwedzi, it can be concluded that the climate of the region is a serious limiting factor for the practice of the rain fed agriculture regardless of other factors as soil topographic conditions (COBA- Profabril: Lisboa Portugal, 1983b, p. 51).

The lack of fertile soils in the area forced some cultivators to travel some 9 km to the nearest village of Mbingo, located along the Shingwedzi River, to find fertile good fields to plant. However, even in places where good soils were available, cultivators needed increased efforts to clear the land (cut down the trees and clear the grass) before planting. This situation was particularly difficult because the government did not give any support (agricultural inputs and machinery to clear new fields) to these families after their relocations in *Coutada 16*. The families had to rely on members of their households to clear new fields (Celeste Mathe, interview by author, MassingirVelho, Jan 23, 2014).

African agricultural practices based on the slash and burn mode have several implications for the fertility of the soils, and after a period of use of the plots, they have to be left unplanted for a period not less than 5 years for the regeneration of fertility. This practice presumed that each household had to have some plots of land in use and another set of plots as fallow grounds. As the interviewees recognised, the moisture rich and fertile soils of the Elephants valley were easier to cultivate and they did not need to leave plots unplanted. These natural conditions along the Elephants river allowed the cultivators in their former villages *(Ncoveni)* to plant twice a year and secure enough food for their families, as they could use the same plots for many years while at the same time reducing the burden of having many fields to work (Winalse Mathe, interview by author, Mavodzi, January 23, 2014).

Given the low and irregular rainfall in the new upland villages, access to the river-fed soils was critical to ensure food security. Some household members went back to the reservoir shore to establish gardens and exploit the fertility of the dark alluvial soils remaining accessible. While in the upland regions of *Coutada 16* they could plant maize and sorghum once a year, the soils of the dam shore allowed them to plant second season maize and vegetables. Cultivating vegetables in maize fields ensured food security as vegetables took only a few weeks to grow and were ready for consumption while waiting for the maize to ripen and be ready for harvest (Abel Ngovene, interview by author, Mavodze, January 23, 2014).

The distances from the new villages to the reservoir shore are approximately 8 km to 17 km, depending on the location of the homesteads. The paths to the reservoir shores are made through thick bushes, hills and very rough terrain. This distance and the topographic condition of the land along the path to the reservoir shore made it impossible for the cultivators to commute to their fields and return home every day. Moreover, given the need to

protect their crops from attacks by hippos and other herbivores, they had to build huts near the shores of the reservoir to live there until the crops were ripe and collected to their homes. The need to protect crops was not only restricted to the fields located along the dam shore, it also affected fields near the new communal villages. Most often, wild stock came to these fields and destroyed crops creating shortages of food for some households. The families were encouraged to build hedges to protect their fields. The situation increased the workload for local families, especially for women who, despite their involvement in agriculture, had to take care of the children and walk long distances to fetch water for bathing and cooking (Rosina Sitoe, interview by author, MassingirVelho, January 17, 2014).

Until recently, no research was undertaken to analyse the impact of the resettlement process caused by the filling of the Massingir dam on families and their social organization, or even on the environment. However, it seems that the coping strategy implemented by the resettled families in *Coutada 16* resulted in the division of the family members for quite long periods; while some members remained in upland regions, others had to live along the Massingir dam shore to protect the crops until they were harvested, collected and transported to their homes. Regarding the environment conditions in the vicinity of the reservoir, the fields that are still actively farmed along the reservoir banks show signs of soil erosion caused by land sliding during the opening of farms on hills along the shore (Alicina Zitha, interview by author, MassingirVelho, January 23, 2014).

The resettlement process caused by the filling of the Massingir dam reservoir had also impacts on livestock management practices. The development of livestock keeping requires the existence of good pastures and water for the cattle. Soon after the establishment of the new villages in *Coutada 16*, local communities faced several difficulties in feeding the cattle. In the village of Massingir Velho, for example, cattle had to be driven for a distance of up to 8 km to Bonzuene (a tributary of the Elephants River) to drink water; in Mavodze village, cattle were driven to the Shingwedzi river, located 9 km from the village. In general, in southern Mozambique and particularly in the Gaza province where the Massingir dam is located, cattle is normally taken care of by young herders aged between 8 and 14 years. Therefore, the development of cattle in such conditions meant that the boys engaged in herding had to spend the whole day taking care of the cattle and thus had little time to help their families in other social activities or even to go to school (Manuela Valoi, interview by author, Mavodze, October 26, 2014).

The resettlement of families affected by the filling of the reservoir in communal villages in the forest in *Coutada 16* exacerbated conflicts between local families and wildlife. Frequently, predators invaded local communities' *kraals*, killing their livestock (goats, chickens and cattle, etc.). From early 1977 to the mid-1980s, many families of the Massingir Velho and Mavodze

Figure 3: A boy guiding cattle to Bonzuene for drinking, 2013. © Paulo José

Figure 4: Resident of the Limpopo National Park - LNP (former *Coutada 16*), who lives near the reservoir, keeps fires lit to prevent the hippopotamus from eating the maize planted along the dam shore in the dry season. Photograph: Milgroom, J. 2012, p. 6.

lost their livestock due to predators. Moreover, the grazing areas evolved from open fields along the Elephants valley to areas with shrubs and trees in *Coutada 16*. Due to the attacks on the cattle in the grazing areas, it became mandatory for the young herders to take with them hunting dogs. The dogs were often used to scent predators when approaching the grazing areas. The barking of the dogs allowed young herders to call their colleagues to help them chase the predators away (Simeão Ngovene, interview by author, Massingir Velho, June 6, 2012).

The relocation of the riverine communities in *Coutada 16* also resulted in changes in cattle keeping practices. Along the Elephants valley, households that had no kids to take care of the cattle, used to bring them to the grazing areas in the evening, leave them grazing overnight, and collect them the following day. This practice allowed the households to work in their fields during the day and to take care of their cattle after returning from their fields. In the new villages, this practice was abandoned due to attacks by predators. It was not secure to leave the cattle grazing overnight in the bush (Simeão Ngovene, interview by author, Massingir Velho, Jun 6, 2012).

Frelimo's social and political structures in *Coutada 16*

In 1977, the party launched campaigns to broaden its base, incorporating new militants at every level (Anton, Johnston. 2014: 287). The party advocated that all the government staff at all levels had to be in alignment with Frelimo's development polices to allow the mobilization of the population, to embrace its central planning strategy and the implementation of the policy for the socialization of the countryside in remote rural areas (Simião Sitoi, interview by author, Massingir Velho, Jan 21, 2014).

Frelimo's strategy to bring into the administration members who were only loyal to the party resulted in the replacement of former heads of rural villages or *régulos* by new chiefs known as secretaries or *secretários*. In most rural villages, the former heads were removed from office not only because of their loyalty to the colonial regime, but also because they represented the traditional practices (power of the ancestors), which was in conflict with Frelimo's nation making project, and with the creation of the *homem novo,* literally, the new man (Meneses, Maria. 2015).

In rural villages and towns, the *secretários* and the mass-based groups composed of Frelimo's sympathizers formed the *grupos dinamizadores* ("dynamizing" groups) whose functions were carrying out administrative, economic and political tasks (Anton, Johnston. 2014. p. 286). Bowen argues that after 1977, in some rural villages in southern Mozambique, the one-party state merged into the same person or the *secretário,* the political and administrative functions. The *secretários* and *grupos dinamizadores* played a fundamental role in the sensitization of their communities so as to embrace Frelimo's policies (Bowen, Marle. 2000. p. 41).

The disruption of the colonial state apparatus at the grassroots level, i.e. the removal of the former local and traditional leaders from the office and the lack of supervision of forests by government staff in *Coutada 16* resulted in anarchy in the management of the local forest resources. The replacement of former local leaders by *secretários* sharpened disparities concerning access to and management of natural resources, particularly, land, forests and wildlife. Despite their removal from office, the traditional leaders continued to be recognized in their communities as legitimate authorities. The *secretários* and the *grupos dinamizadores* did not have the same legitimacy that the traditional leaders had.

While the government reserved to its institutions and staff the management of natural resources, including the supervision of local hunting, the loyalty that the population retained for their traditional leaders allowed them to continue to be in control land allocation in their villages and surroundings. However, they abandoned their duties as guardians of the local forest and supervisors of hunting activities. The *secretários* and the *grupos dinamizadores* lacked authority in their villages. Consequently, it was difficult for them to arrest poachers or illegal hunters and take them to proper institutions to be judged or pay penalties. This situation was particularly worse in the Massingir district because the local government and its staff put much emphasis on the socialization of the countryside and limited activities were implemented to improve the management of natural resources. During the period from 1977 to 1983, the state

of natural resource conservation in *Coutada 16* was appalling as the area witnessed a massive depletion of forest resources and wildlife.

Conclusion

The construction of the Massingir dam along the Elephants River in southern Mozambique resulted in significant transformations of land, ecosystems and society and also implied structural changes. Tihovene, a remote rural village located along the south bank of the Elephants River, was transformed into a modern village to host government staff and workers employed in the construction of the dam. Due to the improvements made during the construction, the town remained the headquarters of the Massingir district.

After independence, the abandonment of the country by technicians involved in the construction of the Massingir dam prevented Frelimo officials to learn from them about the complexity of the project. Lack of such fundamental information led Frelimo officials to change the plan designed by the colonial authorities for the construction of the Massingir Dam. For example, during the completion of the dam wall, there were mistakes that prevented the dam from producing electricity (Amós Matebula, interview by author, Mavodze, January 24, 2014).

The building of the dam also caused displacement of the communities living along the Elephants valley and their relocation to poor soils in upland regions above the flood plains in *Coutada16* (hunting reserve n°16). This relocation resulted in the decrease of the local families' agricultural yields. As a consequence, hunting for food became a means for survival for many households. Moreover, lack of fertile soils in *Coutada 16* forced the communities to seek land in the neighbouring villages and some went back to the reservoir's shore in search of fertile land. Most often, family members had to stay separated for a quite long period of time to work on the fields located far away from the village.

The resettlement process exacerbated the human and wildlife conflicts. Predators came to the communities' *kraal* and killed their livestock. Moreover, communities had also to build hedges to protect their crops from attack of herbivores (gazelles, kudos, elephants, etc.). This situation increased the burden of female work: besides helping in the field women had to take care of children and fetch water. Moreover, differently from the villages located along the Elephants River (where drinking water for the cattle could be found few kilometres from the villages), in *Coutada 16* the local rivers Bonzuene and Shingwedzi run 8 to 10 kilometers away from the new villages (Massingir Velho and Mavodze respectively). The situation increased the time that young boys had to spend taking care of the cattle and had very reduced time to help their families in domestic activities or go to school.

The impact of the resettlement process was very significant on the wildlife management practices. The conflict between Frelimo and traditional authorities that resulted in the replacement of the former by new chiefs (*chefes and secretaries*) loyal to the party left a vacuum in the field of natural resources management. In fact, during the colonial period, the traditional leaders were the effective supervisors of such resources; their removal from office and lack of government staff to take control of the natural resources resulted in a disorder in this field. Thus, poachers took control of the resources. From 1977 to 1983 the area witnessed mass devastation of nature, including wild stock.

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Accessing the Water of the Sabie River in the Heart of a Protected Area

A Fragile Balance Between Guaranteeing Residents' Rights and Limiting their Movements

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Abstract

Based on extracts from field visits and interviews stemming from two periods of doctoral research, this article looks at the macro and micro dynamics of access to water at the Sabie River, in an area where the river constitutes the border between a protected area, i.e. the Kruger National Park, and the inhabited and cultivated areas of a former Bantustan. From the two South African riverbanks, the article examines the point of view of the different users (administrators of the protected area, Ministries in charge of agriculture, farmers and residents) so as to understand the interests of all parties, and examines the methods used by residents and farmers to physically access the river. We will show that a determining element of water access, is the installation of a veterinary fence on the north banks of the Sabie River which, as a result, shuts the watercourse in within the protected area. While their primary objective is to limit the propagation of epizootic diseases, these enclosures also make it possible to filter and monitor the access of riparian populations to the park territory, by limiting access to around fifty gates. These gates, which are installed within the enclosure, allow residents to access the river for their specific needs (often irrigation needs) and to guarantee the use of their water rights. While the gate creation and maintenance system allows some flexibility, as well as the frequent assistance of the government to farmers, paradoxically it seems to reinforce the fragility of access to water. With the explosion of poaching, issues around monitoring the health risk by limiting the movement of populations and domestic herds, combine with issues related to monitoring the territory of the protected area by security services. From this follows a risk of limiting access to water, which is in contradiction with the objective of opening up to neighbouring communities, as recently promoted by the administrators of the protected area.

Keywords: *access to water; water rights; conservation; irrigation; protected area; watercourse*

Introduction: Discovering the study field from a distance through maps

At the beginning of 2018, from my computer, in France, I was becoming acquainted with my future research field, which I had just chosen: the Sabie River, a watercourse flowing from the nord-east of South Africa to the south of Mozambique, where it joins the Incomati River. Until then, I had envisaged a much wider study area, i.e. the entire catchment area of the Incomati River (shared between three countries: South Africa, Mozambique and eSwatini), a natural geographic unit within which riparian countries organise and negotiate water sharing. For my Master's thesis[1], I had indeed studied the vehicles of cross-border co-operation in this vast area. Among the results of the two-month research, I highlighted cross-border dynamics that tend to orient the use of water resources towards activities and products turned essentially towards exportation (ecotourism[2], sugar cane and exotic fruits). These activities and products, which are the consequences of adopted modes of water governance, favour the privatisation of riparian zones and lead to riparian populations seeing their water access being reduced (for fishing, food farming and domestic usage). In this article, I wish to reexamine these results more closely and explore their mechanisms in a more restricted geographical unit, on the scale of the Sabie River.

Of course, when I sought to locate the Sabie River on Google Maps, the map that came up did not show any specific land use, nor did it show water usage and the problems relating to its access. However, two characteristics struck me straight away in the mapped features: a section of the river, of around thirty kilometers, forms a clean border between inhabited areas and a protected area, the Kruger National Park. After studying satellite images of the area using Google Earth, I could see that, in reality, it was definitely more fragmented: the river separes the national park from areas that are clearly cultivated over a strip wide of a few dozen to a few hundred meters; and a major road separates cultivated from inhabited areas. The second characteristic that struck me as a lay person, when it comes to South Africa, was that the toponymy of the inhabited areas shows names of well known European (Lisbon, Belfast, Cork) and Indian (Calcutta, Madras) cities, as well as names I was less familar with (Shabalala, Mkhuhlu, Hoxani). I quickly came up with a set of questions. What is the history of the human settlements and activities behind these names? How does access to the river work in this area? Can the populations that live and cultivate on the edge of the park enter this protected area? Reading various texts brought answers to my first questions relating to toponymy in South Africa (Giraut *et al.* 2008) and to the history of places (Carruthers 1995, Levin and Weiner 1997, du Toit *et al.* 2003), which I will not develop here. Rather, in this article, I will focus on questions relating to water access in this thirty-kilometer corridor.

I will first briefly touch on the geographic and social context of the area under study, and the current specificities regarding access to water. In a second section, I will come back to how I was granted access to the river, by bringing up the obstacles that prevented me from entering the study area, and the encounters that enabled me to overcome them. Introducing interlocutors and presenting a few "field situations"[3] (Agier, 2009) will serve to reveal how relations between groups of users work, relations that lead to creating conditions favouring access to water (spaces for exchanges, dialogues, structuring of user groups, common financing of infrastructures, etc.). It is through reports on the two field visits along the Sabie River – one from inside and one from outside the Kruger National Park – that we will discover many actors, some of whom are not part of the institutional landscape and who, yet, as we will see, play an important role in accessing water.

1. *L'Incomati, un bassin versant sous influence: coopération transfrontalière, sécurité de l'eau and jeuxd'acteurs*. Master's thesis under the supervision of David BLANCHON. Master GEDELO – Université Paris Nanterre.
2. Ecotourism is considered here as an activity turned towards exportation, owing to the significant proportion of international clientele.
3. For Michel Agier (2009, p. 58-61), situations serve to understand the relationships between individuals, spaces and societies, and constitute an ethnographic unit of analysis.

We place ourselves here in the perspective described by Meissner and Jacobs, considering that *"the involvement of individuals and an increasing number of interest groups added a further governance layer initiating small events with powerful outcomes. It is non-state actors and particularly individuals that are, along with states, shaping and reshaping water politics."* (Meissner and Jacobs, 2016).

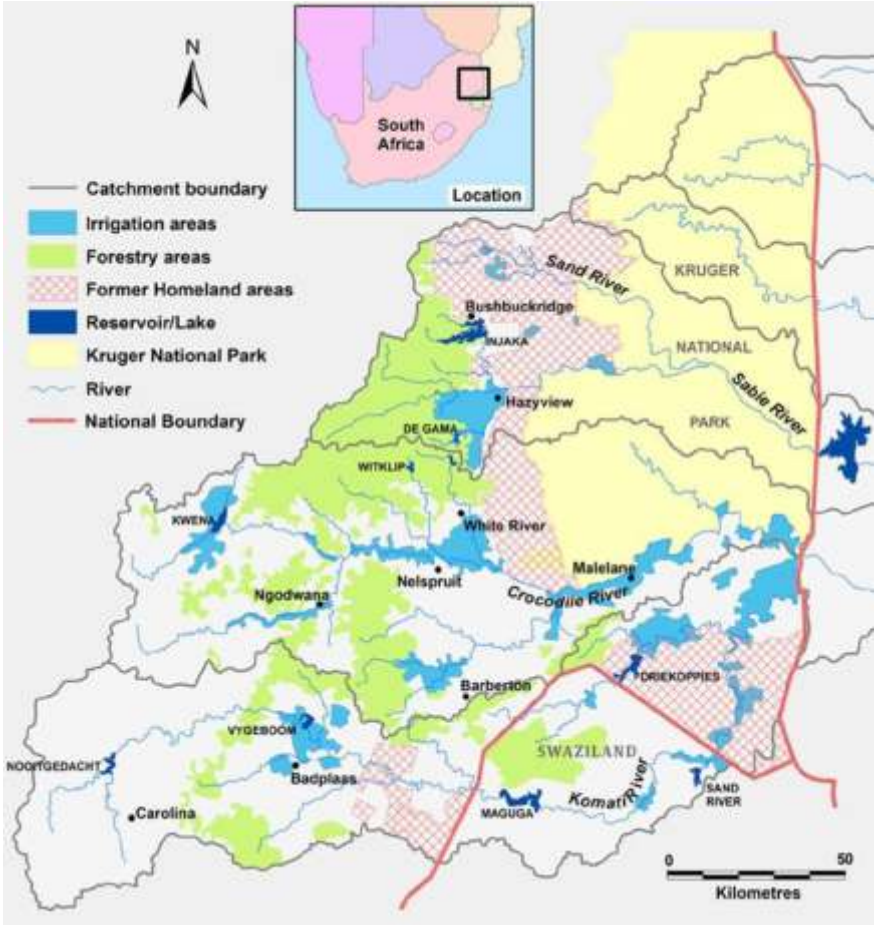
The waters of the Sabie River, between exploitation and conservation: contradictory uses and always unequal access

Geographic context and main water uses

The Sabie River runs for 230 kilometers from the north-east of South Africa up to Mozambique, where it meets the Incomati River. Nearly 90% of the catchment area of the Sabie River is situated in the South African Republic, where the watercourse is marked by the strong presence of very diverse local actors, and by the multiple uses of land, aquatic (Rogers 2006), biological and mineral resources[4]. Sylviculture dominates in the upstream portion of the river, where legal and illegal mining activities can also be observed. Downstream is dedicated to *a priori* incompatible activities. Indeed, leisure and ecotourism activities relying on the natural assets and the wilderness around the river, compete with the basic water needs of the residents in these densely populated urban and rural areas (around Hazyview in particular), as well as with the necessities of food and commercial farming (plantations of exotic fruits, avocado, pears, citrus and macadamia nuts). An important proportion of the riparian spaces around the Sabie River is the subject of conservation policies, as shown by the presence of protected areas including the Kruger National Park, which is crossed by the River over 110 kilometers.

Symbolic of biodiversity in South Africa, the river also constitutes a strategic water reservoir in Mozambique, where it is harnessed as soon as it leaves the Kruger National Park at the Corumana Dam (represented in dark blue on Map 1 below, east of the border between South Africa and Mozambican), to ensure the irrigation of sugar cane plantations as well as the supply of drinking water to Maputo.

The area on which we are going to focus here, is the land strip between Hazyview and Skukuza, where the Sabie River serves as boundary between the communal



Map 1: Land Use in the catchment area of the Inkomati River and borders of former Bantustans. (Brown, 2014)

4. Mineral resources, such as sand, are mined in the bed of the Sabie River, downstream from Hazyview.

lands of the former Bantustan[5] of Gazankulu, and the protected area of the Kruger National Park. Before bringing up the particularities of accessing water in this specific area, we propose to analyse the main issues regarding access to water in the catchment area of the Sabie River.

The specificities of accessing water at the Sabie River

Since 2006, the regulation of water uses and access is ensured by the Inkomati Usuthu Catchment Management Agency (IUCMA), of which one of the main functions is to deliver water use licenses and to ensure balance between the different uses[6]. Access to water resources still depends largely on the historical legacy of discriminatory policies, and on the footprint of apartheid in town and country planning (Denby *et al.* 2017). The fertile lands of the Sabie River valley (cf. the large perimeter irrigated west of Hayview, represented on Map 1) were distributed to WWII veterans, with a gravity-based irrigation system (canal) built by war prisoners. These lands were subsequently divided and sold, and current commercial farmers still benefit from important water rights, guaranteed by the persistence of rights issued under the former regime.

The allocation of riparian spaces located between Hazyview and the Paul Kruger Gate (one of the park's main entrances leading to the main village of Skukuza), comes under "Grand Apartheid[7]" territorial engineering which is behind the creation of two Bantustans, where black populations were displaced in the 1960s. Between the Phabeni and Kruger entrance gates, the Sabie River marks the border between the National Park and the rural areas of the former Bantustans of KaNgwane and Gazankulu (see Map 2).

Map 2: Location of the study area between the Phabeni and Paul Kruger Gates. (Bushbuckridge Master Plan, 2013)

This spatial configuration constitutes a specificity and assumes important issues from the point of view of access to the river and its resources. In a study conducted in 2012, Regourd examined, among others, the issue of water access in these rural areas, and remarked as follows:

> *"[B]lack farmers who are in drier areas, on more sandy soils and who do not always have access to water despite the*

5. The Bantustans or Homelands are defined by Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch as "archipelago territories, fragmented, without major resources, […] conceived as new nations, which must accede to independence". Their establishment originates in a dividing "social engineering programme" or "grand apartheid", the national space between white areas and Bantustans reserved for each ethnic group" and […] denying the majority of Africans their South African citizenship and evicting by force more than 3,5 million people from so-called white areas towards their so-called homeland". "Ten Bantustans were thus proclaimed: Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, KwaZulu, Gazankulu, KwaNdebele, QwaQwa, Lebowa, KaNgwane". (Houssay-Holzschuch *et al.*, 2017).
6. For an analysis of the creation process of this institution and the influence of spatial segregation policies in its operation, see Denby *et al.* 2017. In their study, the authors look at how this institution transforms access to water for black farmers in the district of Nkomazi, south of the Kruger National Park.
7. "Apartheid which referred to the "separate development of races" in Afrikaans, […] was above all a government practice that systematised segregative principles inherited from the colonial era. Apartheid relied on the strict normalisation and hierarchical organisation of racial categories, and on a set of spatial techniques of government and domination. In fact, it is possible to distinguish three different and partly successive apartheids. "Petty apartheid" […] governed the separate use of public spaces and even domestic spaces, as well as social relations between hierarchical groups. […] "Residential apartheid" – or urban apartheid – confined, on the scale of urban areas, the different racial groups into well-defined zones, where even the townships for Black, Coloured and Indian people were separated from the actual town (in the municipal sense) containing the town centre and white suburbs, by a buffer zone. "Grand apartheid" […] aimed at establishing internal decolonisation, by granting independence to the famous Bantustans made up of discontinued and economically dependent lands, and as such at doing away with the political issue of civil and political rights of the majority of the population, that had become pseudo-citizens in these pseudo-States." (Giraut, 2009).

existence of irrigated schemes, are unable to organise themselves and are dependent on social grants and incomes from migrant labour. [...] *[A]lthough farmers downstream of the Sabie River Valley have seen their situation improve since the extension of the irrigated area in 2005, the water quantities available are far from sufficient and the lack of well-defined water rights limits the area under cultivation and slows down the agricultural development in this area.* [...] *Although the river ecosystem is fragile and the downstream farmers could theoretically pump water, security issues such as pump theft and the current high cost of energy deprives them of it.*" (Regourd 2012)

We will now focus on water access at the Sabie River, in this interface area between the Kruger National Park and the rural areas of former Bantustans. Where the riparian areas along the Sabie River accommodate a diversity of actors and users of water resources, how is this diversity structured? Are there conflicts or alliances in water management that guide, influence or orient choices and potentiels for accessing water? We chose to apprehend these research problems from the Kruger National Park, which was our main point of entry to the river and its users. Indeed, the Park is one of the main users of the Sabie River, owing to its strategic geographic position, and to its influence as a political, economic and scientific actor. We obtained a research permit from the authorities of the Park for 2019-2020, which gave us an advantage: we benefitted from the Park's logistic and scientific support, and had privileged access to, among others, geographic, biological and strategic data, as well as to the network of actors. Moreover, the Park constitutes a privileged place for observing interactions between the different groups of water users along the Sabie River. However, despite these favourable circumstances, we met several obstacles in accessing the study area.

Overcoming hurdles to reach the study field

Accessing the cultivated areas between Hazyview and the Paul Kruger Gate was indeed made difficult by several factors: insecurity, difficult access to roads and, *a priori*, no intermediary to introduce me to the residents. In May 2019, during my second field trip, I had the opportunity to experience these issues at first hand. To begin with, I had to discover the area from the main road, the R536, linking Hazyview to the Paul Kruger Gate. From the road, the river can barely be seen: the enclosure of the private reserves, the fronts of hotels, tourist residences and farms hide the view in the few places where the road nears the river. In one of these rare spots where the view is clear, I was able to observe that an enclosure had been installed between agricultural lands and the river, and seemed to extend far beyond these lands.

While the existence of secondary roads makes it possible to come near the watercourse, the stories published in the press and the warnings from several residents concerning insecurity, dissuaded me from driving there. Furthermore, as I later discovered, I would have needed an off-road vehicle (4x4) to drive on these roads, which I did not have at my disposal.

Also, I decided to first follow the river boundary from the inside of the Kruger National Park, on the south bank. However, from there, I could not observe the other bank properly. I could see an enclosure, and sometimes hotel buildings and cultivated lands; on the other hand, the fact that it was forbidden to get out of one's vehicle in the park, and that there were very few places with a clear view, prevented me from observing anything in detail.

Photograph 1: The Sabie River see from the Kruger National Park in June 2019. We can see in the distance an enclosure and fruit trees.
© Nicolas Verhaeghe

It was at the end of June 2019, when my trip was coming to an end, that I was finally able to enter the area, and that I was truly able to understand the dynamics at play to access water. As we will see, I will come back to three field situations that led me to refine my understanding of the water uses and user groups, and the resulting implications. With the first situation, i.e. a farm visit, I will come back to my discovery of a fundamental and determining element for accessing irrigation water for farmers. The two subsequent situations, which I experienced within one week of each other, will make it possible to contrast the water access issues and macrodynamics observed from inside the Park, through the perspective of a unique user (the Park authorities), as well as the microsocial dynamics at play from outside the Park for multiple users.

Initial situation: Discovering the gates giving access to the river for irrigation purposes

It was in late June 2019, at the end of my second research trip, that I was able to visit the farm of Danny, whom I was introduced to by a young man called Boris who worked at the tourist camp of Skukuza, and with whom I got on well. Because he often saw me sitting in front of my laptop at the restaurant making the most of the internet access, he took an interest in my work. Since he lived in Mkhuhlu and was well acquainted with the river and its residents, I asked him if he knew people who regularly used the river water. He then offered to introduce me to Danny, who runs a farm on the north bank of the Sabie River. I made an appointment with Danny on one of his days off, so that he could accompany me to his mechanical workshop (his other activity), based in Cork. A former military, when he retired Danny was allocated a piece of land by the traditional chief, land that was part of the irrigated perimeter of Hoxani. His brother-in-law, Richard, farms the land. Our interview had barely started that Danny began to tell me about the difficulties with which he and the other farmers were confronted, and which prevented them from using their water rights:

> "*We as farmers, we do have many farms; due to some problems of pumping engines, we don't use the water, then the percentage that we're supposed to utilise, we don't reach, it's only 30 % of what we are using.*"

I asked him if access to the water was organised with the other farmers who are members of the irrigated perimeter; he replied that each farmer had a permit at his disposal and had pumps installed inside the Park, to which they have access through gates:

> "*We got many gates this side, where you can walk towards the river and you pump the water there* [...]. *It's open, the boundary is the river, it's the Sabie River, we are not allowed to cross the river, but from the other side of the river, we walk towards the river no problem, the Park they give us that authority.*"

I then asked him about the irrigation technique he used, and he indicated that he used an individual pump, purchased three years before, following the failure of a public programme of electric pumps installed for the twelve farmers of the irrigated perimeter. For lack of public funds for their maintenance, the pumps started to break down bit by bit, resulting in half the farms being abandoned.

> "*The electric pump, that was broken and they didn't repair it again because it was so expensive for them, it was done by the government, then they don't have any NGO.* [...] *that pump was supplying twelve farms.* [...] *But now the twelve farms, maybe, not even half, are active.*"

Accompanied by Richard, we then went to the farm, where a woman of around sixty years old opened the gate, giving us access to the river. Richard showed me the diesel engine he used for pumping water, indicating that it costs almost 300 Rands per day (around 20 Euros). I asked them if other residents use this gate to enter the Parc, and Boris translated for me what Richard replied in Xitsonga.

> "*Usually they lock the gate so... only he* [Danny] *has the power to let people in, either the workers or him, because he has the key to the gates.*"

We then went to the workshop to meet Danny, whom I would like to thank here for allowing me to see these access gates, about which Danny explained:

Photographs 2 and 3: Access gate at the Sabie River (left) and irrigation pump (right), June 2019. © Nicolas Verhaeghe

> "*And those gates, every farm got that gate* [...]. *Once you got a farm, you get a license for... entering through the gate.*"

Before leaving, Danny gave me the contact details of Charles, whom he called a "*middleman*" and who co-ordinated four agricultural co-operatives; he said to me that, that man "knows everything and everyone". I met Charles a few days later, in Skukuza. In 1997, he took over his grand-father's farm on the edge of the Sabie River. After I introduced the object of my research to him, he began the interview by explaining that the location of the wire fencing that separates the river from the adjacent villages had changed: before, "the fence was on the other side of the Park and the water was on our side". Charles explained that the fencing was moved because the Kruger National Park wanted to have exclusive usage of the Sabie River. I questioned him about his own access to the water, and he indicated that he has an electric pumping system; his bill comes to around 7000 Rands a month (around 450 Euros).

I asked if he knew about the existence of collective projects for the improvement of water access for groups of farmers; he mentioned a "bulk water pipeline to provide water". In fact, he was referring to the Sabie River Stewardship Project, which I knew about and which we will bring up further on (see Box). Sceptical about the purpose of that projet, Charles feared that it was a manoeuvre to prevent farmers from entering the Park and explained that, for the time being, the majority of the farmers cultivating on the edge of the Park receive water from the Park:

> "*We are sourcing water from the river and the river it's inside the park [...].We are getting water from the Park now, so that's why if you drive around the farms, you'll see that boundary fence. [...] In each farm there is a gate which allows the farm owner to enter and they do his farm business in there in terms of sourcing water... our pumps are right in the Park, just next to the river.*"

He concluded by saying: "*So this idea it's like they want to prevent farmers from entering the Park by getting water outside.*" A few days before my departure, Charles confirmed that, to the farmers, gates are a strategic issue. In the following sections, I will talk about the role and management of these gates, as well as the tensions they create between users. Almost five months later, I was able to take a closer look at these aspects, during a new field trip.

Situation 1: Observing the macrodynamics of accessing water and the uses of the river from inside the Park

On my return to South Africa, for a third research trip in October 2019, Kiera, my contact person with SANParks[8], asked me if I wanted to join her on a field trip. Indeed, she had decided to accompany a lecturer and a student from the University of the Witwatersrand, who had come to take measurements of the water quality at the Sabie River, one of their areas of study, to test new methods of analysis.

To get to one of the two sampling sites, we drove on the Sabie River Road, a sand road that runs parallel to the river. From that road, the Sabie River constitutes the boundary between the Park and the neighbouring villages. During the car trip, Kiera indicated that she had travelled that entire road on foot the previous year, over four days, in order to map the points of water extraction (irrigation pumps) from the other bank. She explained that her teams had identified these points beforehand, as well as infrastructures installed near the Sabie River outside the Park, and that she was just perfoming a verification visit. She did identify a few new pumping points, and used the opportunity to map obvious fishing areas, where fishing nets had been set up in the river. I asked her if, during her walk, she had noticed whether a lot of people came to the river: she pointed out that residents from Belfast and Cork regularly came to the river to do their washing.

A few days later, I wanted to know more about the context of her mapping work on water usage by riparian populations. Kiera then explained:

> "*It was basically part of our status-quo assessment of our WWF Sabie project* [...] *basically trying to map out all the farming areas* [...]. *It actually starts way back, about four years ago when, as you know we've got a poaching problem in the Park, and so the security personnel started to just query the rights to access into the Sabie River.* [...] *At the same time, the Department of Agriculture was upgrading the veterinary fence along the Sabie River, that's where I started to interact with the Khomanani forum.* [...] *So basically that mapping was to verify the extent of lawful entries into the Park boundaries for irrigation use, so that's why we did the mapping, just to go and document all the pumping points so that they can be documented and also that they could be provided to the Rangers and the veterinary services, so that they knew where they would have to put in new pedestrian gates for irrigation access.*"

This usage identification and mapping exercice was to help informing different issues (health security, security and fight against poaching, as well as protecting aquatic environments), involving several services and teams that had something to say about the installation of the "gates" to access water, irrigation water in particular. Moreover, the data collected served as the basis for organising a larger project: the Sabie River Water Stewardship Project which I had already tried to follow during a previous field trip, between May and July 2019.

While pursuing our journey in the car, Kiera pointed out lands on the other bank, and an abandoned 300-hectare farm in particular. She explained that, despite the fact that this farm benefits from water rights, no one takes full advantage of them, rights which are coveted and run the risk of being removed. She also explained that the safeguard of these water rights is one of the reasons why the Sabie River Water Stewardship Project was created:

> "*I mean that was one of the reasons why we set up the Sabie stewardship Project, [which] was to basically try and get investment back in, so that these areas can be productive again, there's enough water in the system.* [...] *That farm has water rights but it's not being utilised at the moment, people call me to ask about it, because the people are looking for those water rights, that's what I keep on telling these farmers: "If you don't start using it soon, it's gonna be taken away"*."

8. South African National Parks, semi-public organisation that administers national parks in South Africa.

Sabie River Water Stewardship Project

This project is the result of exchanges between farmers cultivating along the Sabie River, on the edge of the Kruger National Park, who were looking for a collective solution to remedy their low access to water. Having offered SANParks to support them in this process, SANParks organised a project with the WWF Nedbank Green Trust. It is run by SANParks (Kruger National Park) and administered by Kruger 2 Canyon Biosphere Region Non Profit Company[9], and aims at facilitating access to irrigation water from the Sabie River for four irrigated perimeters.

The objective of SANParks is also to better control usage on the edge of the Park, so as to conserve the river (the reason why the project intends to favour agro-ecological practices), and make of it a buffer zone. The project also intends to bring together "commercial" users (commercial farmers and forestry businesses) and "emergent users" on the scale of the catchment area of the Sabie River. To this end, the project plans to create a discussion and exchange platform, so as to better co-ordinate efforts made in fighting against invasive plants (which harness an important quantity of water), so as to free the volumes of water that are trapped upstream, and redistribute them downstream. For this part of the project, the idea is to work with the Department of Environmental Affairs[10], and to ensure that the programme Working for Water is well co-ordinated and highly efficient in treating invasive plants. One of the main stakes of the project is, firstly, to assist co-operatives in managing water better, by offering training sessions and using technological tools, and secondly to guarantee water rights, particularly for one of the irrigated perimeters which is not currently benefitting from any (Goromane). Lastly, the project must make it possible to structure the collective organisation of the four co-operatives (Khomanani Forum)[11].

During the time I spent following this project between May and July 2019, farmers had also proposed the construction of an irrigation infrastructure: it concerned a 30-kilometer pipeline between Hazyview and Belfast, carrying water using gravity towards the farmers' lands in the four perimeters. At the time of my departure, discussions were under way to organise a pre-project and to promote it with public institutions for potentially financing the infrastructure. However, on my return to South Africa in October, the project had been suspended for "political" reasons, with no further explanation.

The Sabie River Water Stewardship Project constitutes the first true project inaugurating the Kruger National Park's new policy of openness toward riparian populations, formalised in the new park strategy[12]. According to Kiera, this is the consequence of a policy started in 2008 by the South African government, that called for a mouvement of openness of the national parks towards riparian populations, and for ensuring that these populations benefit more from natural assets.

She also highlighted the fact that one of the objectives of the project, is to maintain economic activities going on the farms at the edge of the Sabie River, by the Kruger National Park, and that this would then guarantee that water rights are maintained, while making it possible for the park to benefit from these additional volumes:

"[...] *And what I want to do is keep them coming down here for an economic purpose because it still flows 40 kilometers along the Kruger Park boundary, so it's still having an ecosystem service role, I mean we have the reserve implemented pretty well, but a little bit of extra water would be good.*"

9. Established in 2011, this organisation co-ordinates activities for the conservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage in the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Reserve, an area of close to 2,5 million hectares straddling the provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, and that includes the Kruger National Park and the Blyde River Canyon. Biosphere reserves depend on UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme that ratifies their recognition on the proposals of the States.
10. Renamed the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) in June 2019.
11. For a presentation of the project, see the article on the bizcommunity website: https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/643/187491.html
12. Kruger National Park Management Plan for the period 2018-2028.

As such, by studying this project, which aims at maintaining water rights (or even at granting new rights) for the riparian residents of the park, we can understand the extent to which water constitutes a major strategic issue. Indeed, these rights are coveted and run the risk of being redistributed, while the water allocation reform is ongoing in the Incomati River catchmnent area. As the most downstream user of the Sabie River in South Africa, the Park seems to want to anticipate the potential effects of this reform, by becoming allied with other users, so as to ensure that this strategic watercourse is preserved as much as possible. It is in this spirit that Kiera, thrilled, said to the lecturer from Wits that the Mozambican authorities are increasingly becoming aware of the importance of water quality, and of the strategic importance of the Sabie River in particular, which makes of them an additional ally.

During this field situation, I found myself confronted with only one user of the Sabie River, i.e. the Kruger National Park, and with macro-issues linked to water access on a large scale. In the following situation, we will see how accessing water is experienced from the other bank, through the analysis of local microdynamics.

Situation 2: Observing the macrodynamics of accessing water from outside the Park

One week later, while I spoke to Kiera again to examine in detail different elements evoked during our visit, we went over the issue of the gates. I wanted to undertand what they were all about. First, I learned that the enclosure constitutes a disease control fence, which does not come under the authority of SANParks, and which aims at protecting industrial and domestic cattle against diseases originating from the fauna of the Park (buffalos in particular). Concerning the management of the gates, Kiera indicated that there is no formal system and advised me to speak to Laura and Henry, employees of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), which is responsible for maintaining the gates giving access to the river.

A few days later, when I went to make an appointment for a meeting with her, Laura welcomed me with much enthousiasm in her office and, unexpectedly, she spared me the time for an interview. Coincidentally, she introduced me to her colleague Henry, who had planned an inspection of the veterinary fence and the gates along the Sabie River, over the following two days.

Highly talkative, Laura explained at once that her service does not have jurisdiction to control access to the Kruger, and that the decision to let users enter the Park concerns SANParks. She informed me about the management of the gates giving access to the river, confirming that there was no formal system:

> "*When we get a request for a gate on our fence, then we always pass on to SANParks, because the moment there's a gate, obviously there's a request for access which I cannot give* [...] *If they're happy then we consider if we should pay for the gate or the owner pays for the gate, usually the owner would have to pay for it but* [...] *we often build the gate for free because* [...] *it's for the better, but we still have to go with SANParks, again not in a formalised process but through emails to the right people*."

I learned that a veterinary fence had been installed since the 1960s all around the Park, to prevent the propagation of epizootic diseases from the wildlife (the foot and mouth disease in particular) in the herds of domestic animals. In certain configurations where watercourses mark the boundary of the park, as is the case for the Sabie River, gates were fitted into the enclosure, which enables residents to access the river for specific needs (often irrigation needs), and to ensure that they use their water rights. Removing any other resource is prohibited and considered as poaching, and crossing the fence is considered as trespassing the Park.

Along the Sabie River, around fifty gates have been fitted into the enclosure, with the majority of them being reserved for farmers to enable them to easily install and maintain their irrigation pumps. In addition, four or five gates allow the residents of riparian villages to access the river for domestic uses. Laura summed up the paradox which managing these gates represents:

> "*The fence and the access [are] a problem because we try to get the people to stay out of the Park without taking away their right to the water, because that's not something*

[…] *we control as the Department of Agriculture, the fence is not our mandate, so if SANParks says: "they're supposed to have access", I must actually build a gate for them because my fence is only there for buffalo*."

During recent works to replace electric fencing, many gates were condemned. I asked Laura about the way decisions were made concerning maintaining or eliminating these gates, she indicated that this depended on how their usage was assessed by her service, i.e. whether the path around the gate looked like it was frequently used or not. The decision depended also on the potential presence of irrigation pumps:

"*I cannot prevent the guy from accessing his pump, if there's a pump there, we leave the gate, if there's no pump there, we close the fence quickly. So, with the new fence we build, and you will see the new cables of fence, we removed quite a lot of gates actually*."

Aware of the practical reasons for which irrigation pumps are installed inside the Park, close to the Sabie River, she explained that farmers can pump the water from the river at a lower cost, because the closer the pump is to the water, the less energy it will require. This means that the Department of Agriculture must guarantee that farmers have physical access to the river which, owing to the installation of the veterinary fence, is inside the Park.

Yet this gate system seems to pose a problem to the Department of Agriculture, as well as to the security services of the Kruger National Park. These gates often remain open, which can represent an exit point for the wildlife, or an entry point for domestic animals or other riparian residents. Domestic herds that come to drink from the river are regularly trapped inside the park, because they are not often guarded and roam fairly freely. Considered as illegal, wandering animals using the river as a drinking point is nonetheless tolerated by the services of the Department of Agriculture, especially in times of drought where few alternate water points can be accessed in the area. Also, during my visit with Henry, we had to chase out of the park a herd that got stuck there – a daily phenomenon in the summer months.

Likewise, but in the other direction, elephants regularly cross the enclosure through the gates, ending up

Photographs 4 and 5: A herd trapped inside the park (4) is driven outside the fence (5), October 2019. © Nicolas Verhaeghe

Photographies 6 and 7: Gates to access the Sabie River damaged by elephants, October 2019. © Nicolas Verhaeghe

walking on the lands of neighbouring farmers. These gates have indeed become weak spots in the enclosure, since the recent modification of the type of wire fence used; they are regularly crossed by pachyderms fond of produce cultivatd on the edge of the Park. Two elephants had even been killed while I was visiting, because they got out of the park by destroying the gates and devastated several cultures. In such a case, no compensation system seems to be in place for injured farmers. In one of the farms visited, the irrigation pipes had been destroyed by the elephants, although this time it was inside the Park.

Laura summed up these different problems:

> *"Another problem with the pumping is a lot of people, when we speak to the security guys, the first thing they tell you is "they must move that pump outside the fence" but we say it's not that simple* [...]. *One could consider a well* [...] *outside the fence, and you could pump from outside the same water you would have pumped inside,* [...] *so you can completely avoid the gate conflict because the gate causes a zone conflict, more human conflicts than anything else and you also avoid the livestock-alien conflict* [...] *at that time of the year for example, you catch cattle inside the Park. That makes the Sabie River quite tricky*."

In order to reduce the number of vulnerable spots in the veterinary fence, the service responsible for its maintenance was at the time trying to enforce new rules, to ensure that gates remained closed. According to these rules, farmers were to finance themselves access gates, as well as their repair and maintenance. However, in many cases described by Henry and Laura or observed directly, their service continues to finance and repair the gates by offering the assistance of their technicians. At the time of the inspection visit, Henry was informing populations of his intention to call a meeting of all farmers cultivating along the Sabie River, so as to explain these new rules. The other solution imagined to reduce the fragility of the enclosure, consisted in having the Department of Agriculture install narrower gates to prevent elephants from getting out.

During the inspection visit, I was also able to observe that the river was being used for purposes other than irrigation. I discovered in particular that religious

Photographs 8 and 9: In order to reduce the vulnerability of the enclosure, the DALRRD condemned an access gate (8) and installed a narrower gate (9), October 2019. © Nicolas Verhaeghe

Photographs 10 and 11: After crossing the gates giving access to the Sabie River (10), residents do their washing in the river and draw water for domestic needs (11), October 2019. © Nicolas Verhaeghe

ceremonies, gathering many people and rituals practiced by traditional healers, were taking place near the river. During periods of drought, traditional healers often come from remote villages (sometimes up to 30 kilometers), because the Sabie River constitutes the only watercourse with a sufficient flow. Apart from this usage, some residents draw water in containers for their own domestic needs, and stock it in their homes which are badly or not connected to a drinking water network. Let us note that the gates giving access to the Park are far from the surrounding villages, and that to reach them, villagers need to cross the main road, or even neighbouring fields, which creates risks of accidents and potential conflicts with farmers.

Some residents use the opportunity of having access to the Park to take resources that have become rare in communal areas (such as fire wood, roots, reeds, fish). With a fence enclosing the river inside the Park, many residents actually find themselves trespassing and, as such, run the risk of being considered as poachers. The distinction becomes vague as to what qualifies a criminal act (real poaching? trespassing?) and what sanction it should incur. Also, this vagueness is the source of much tension between the security services of the Park, the riparian residents who enter the Park for authorised uses, but also for subsistence purposes that are tolerated but considered illegal, and those who enter the Park to undertake activities considered as offences or even crimes. Entering the park puts residents at risk when they cross the busy road or are attacked by the wildlife. Yet, the vagueness of the law resides also in the actual location of the fenced boundary, and some residents corroborate what was said previously by Charles, who considers that the enclosure should be on the other bank. A young man who came to draw water explained to Henry, who translated as follows:

> "*This river belongs to the community; the Park requested that this fence be on this side just to allow the animals to also have access here, otherwise if the fence was on the other side, then the animals wouldn't be able to get water; but actually this fence shouldn't be here, it should be on the other side of the river, that's why now there are gates and people are being allowed to access the river*."

The installation of the enclosure on the north bank of the Sabie River has many consequences. On the side of the Kruger National Park, it ensures that the wildlife has access to the river and offers a unique panorama on the river, while increasing the surface area of the Park. The wire fencing has indeed been placed on the bank a few hundred meters away from the water, which makes the distance to the river even further for the cultivated lands and neighbouring villages. This enclosure, in addition to its health protection objective, also makes it possible to filter and control access to the Park's territory along the Sabie River, by limiting access to around fifty gates. With the recent explosion of international trafficking (rhinoceros horn in particular) perpetrated by criminal organisations, controlling intrusions into the Park was tightened even more. Issues relating to the control of health risks by restricting the movement and traffic of populations and herds, and especially their entry into the Park, is from now on combined with issues linked to the control of the territory by the security services of the Park. What emerges from this is an obvious contradiction with the objective of openness towards neighbouring communities, as recently promoted by the Kruger National Park. Faced with this complex situation, the authorities administering the Park and the services in charge of controlling the veterinary fence, view the creation of hotel residences or private reserves favourably, in that these contribute to limiting movement in a space otherwise difficult to control. Cross-checking the words of Laura and Kiera illustrates this assertion. For Laura, the new constructions make her job easier in that they create an additional buffer zone that will not be crossed by herds:

> "*This road from Kruger Gate to Hazyview, which is parallel to the Sabie River basically most of the way, so south of that road you've got new developments* [...]. *In a way, I don't actually mind them because to me that puts an extra buffer where we know livestock is not going to move, but from a water extraction point of view I presume it's going to be bad because there are actually places that need a lot of water* [...]."

Making a parallel between her words and those of Kiera, illustres the current trend to convert agricultural lands, which is facilitated by agreements that authorise zoning inside the Kruger National Park:

"*This is also Traditional Council land, that's been sold off to developers, by the Chief* [...] *for quite a long-term lease* [...]. *They want to zone themselves into the Park, because that land is zoned agricultural land, not conservation land, or protected environment, so... then if you get zoned into a Park, then a whole lot of other things have to happen, you have to get contractual arrangements with the Kruger, because we then become the conservation management authority,* [...] *so we often get requests from the developers to do that. But there's a lot of development of that land to tourist land, or lodges.*"

The conversion of agricultural lands towards ecotourism or their integration into a conservation zone, is combined with the risk of seeing one's water rights withdrawn, as described above. A non utilised piece of land can, as such, be sold and its water rights withdrawn, which represents a risk leading to the reduction of access to the Sabie River. An important number of agricultural lands is not farmed, and their water rights are not necessarily used, owing in particular to the high cost of energy required to pump the water. Moreover, access to irrigation water for farmers living on the edge of the Kruger depends on the installation of pumps situated inside the Park. It involves crossing enclosure gates and entering what is considered as the Park's territory. While the gate creation and maintenance system allows some flexibility, as well as the frequent assistance of the Department of Agriculture to farmers, paradoxically it seems to reinforce the fragility of access to water. That being the case, neighbouring farmers of the Park face many difficulties, and particularly the lack of land security, where the allocation of land falls under the jurisdiction of tribal chiefs who are considered to represent the Land Authority, where some of the land can be converted towards other uses. What happens when land is not cultivated for several years? Will access gates be condemned? Could the pressure created by land issues result in a conversion decided by those who own it, i.e. tribal chiefs? What about the opinion of the occupants or their children wanting to cultivate the land years later?

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Accéder à l'eau de la Sabie river au cœur d'une aire protégée

Un fragile équilibre entre garantie des droits des riverains et limitation de leurs mouvements

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Résumé

A partir d'extraits de visites de terrain et d'entretiens issus de deux périodes de recherches doctorales, cet article propose d'observer les macro et micro-dynamiques de l'accès à l'eau de la *Sabie river* dans un espace où la rivière constitue la frontière entre une aire protégée, le *Kruger National Park,* et les zones habitées et cultivées d'un ancien bantoustan. Depuis les deux rives sud-africaines de la rivière, l'article se place du point de vue des différents usagers (gestionnaires de l'aire protégée, ministère en charge de l'agriculture, cultivateurs et habitants riverains) pour saisir leurs intérêts et le fonctionnement de l'accès physique à la rivière pour les habitants et cultivateurs. Comme nous le montrerons, un élément déterminant de l'accès à l'eau est l'installation d'une clôture vétérinaire sur les berges de la rive nord de la Sabie qui enferme de fait le cours d'eau au sein de l'aire protégée. Si son objectif premier vise à limiter la propagation d'épizooties, elle permet également de filtrer et de contrôler l'accès au territoire du parc pour les populations riveraines en le limitant à une cinquantaine de portes piétonnes (*pedestrian gates*). Ces portes d'accès installées au sein de la clôture permettent aux riverains d'accéder à la rivière pour leurs besoins spécifiques (souvent l'irrigation) et de garantir l'usage de leurs droits d'eau. Si le système de création et de maintenance des portes autorise une certaine souplesse, et une assistance fréquente du gouvernement aux agriculteurs, il semble paradoxalement renforcer la fragilité de l'accès à l'eau. Avec l'explosion du braconnage, les enjeux de contrôle du risque sanitaire par la limitation des mouvements des populations et des troupeaux domestiques se combinent en effet aux enjeux liés au contrôle du territoire de l'aire protégée par ses services de sécurité. En découle un risque de limitation de l'accès à l'eau, qui entre en contradiction avec l'objectif d'ouverture vers les communautés voisines, promu récemment par les gestionnaires de l'aire protégée.

Mots-clés : accès à l'eau ; droits d'eau ; conservation ; irrigation ; aires protégées ; cours d'eau

Introduction : La découverte du terrain à distance par les cartes

Au début de l'année 2018, depuis mon ordinateur, en France, je faisais connaissance avec mon futur terrain de recherche que je venais à peine de choisir : il s'agissait de la *Sabie river,* un cours d'eau s'écoulant du nord-est de l'Afrique du Sud au sud du Mozambique, où il rejoint le fleuve Incomati. Jusqu'alors, j'avais envisagé une zone d'étude plus vaste, à savoir la totalité du bassin hydrographique de l'Incomati (partagé par trois pays : Afrique du Sud, Mozambique et eSwatini) — une unité géographique naturelle au sein de laquelle les pays riverains organisent et négocient le partage des eaux qui s'y forment. Pour mon mémoire de Master 2[1], j'avais en effet étudié les vecteurs de la coopération transfrontalière dans cette vaste zone. Parmi les résultats de cette recherche de deux mois, j'avais mis en évidence des dynamiques transfrontalières qui tendent à orienter l'utilisation des ressources en eau vers des activités et des produits essentiellement tournés vers l'exportation (écotourisme[2], canne à sucre, fruits exotiques). Conséquence des modes de gouvernance des eaux, ces phénomènes favorisent une privatisation des espaces riverains et s'accompagnent d'une réduction de l'accès aux cours d'eau des populations riveraines (pêche, agriculture vivrière, usages domestiques). Aussi ai-je souhaité approfondir ce résultat et en explorer les mécanismes dans une unité géographique plus restreinte, à l'échelle d'une rivière, la Sabie.

Bien évidement, quand j'ai cherché à localiser la *Sabie river* sur Google Maps, la cartographie ne m'a permis ni de prendre connaissance de l'occupation précise des sols, ni des usages de l'eau et des problématiques relatives à son accès. Cependant, deux caractéristiques m'ont tout de suite frappé dans les éléments représentés : une portion de la rivière, d'une trentaine de kilomètres, forme une frontière nette entre des zones habitées et une aire protégée, le *Kruger National Park*. En observant les images satellites de Google Earth, je remarquai qu'en réalité, cet espace était nettement plus fragmenté : la rivière sépare le parc national de zones visiblement cultivées, sur une bande d'une largeur variant de quelques dizaines à quelques centaines de mètres ; un axe routier sépare quant à lui ces espaces cultivés des zones habitées. Deuxième élément marquant pour le profane peu connaisseur de l'Afrique du Sud : la toponymie de ces zones habitées mêlait des noms de villes européennes connues (Lisbon, Belfast, Cork), indiennes (Calcutta, Madras) et des noms avec lesquels j'étais moins familier (Shabalala, Mkhuhlu, Hoxani). Un ensemble de questions a rapidement émergé. Quelle est l'histoire du peuplement et des activités humaines qui se cache derrière ces appellations ? Comment l'accès à la rivière fonctionne-t-il dans cet espace ? Les populations qui vivent et cultivent en lisière du parc peuvent-elles pénétrer dans cette aire protégée ? Diverses lectures ont apporté des réponses aux premières questions relatives à la toponymie en Afrique du Sud (Giraut et al. 2008) et à l'histoire des lieux (Carruthers 1995, Levin et Weiner 1997, du Toit et al. 2003), que je ne développerai pas ici. Je me concentrerai en effet, dans cet article, sur les interrogations relatives à l'accès à l'eau dans ce corridor de trente kilomètres.

J'évoquerai d'abord brièvement le contexte géographique et social de la zone étudiée et les spécificités de l'accès à l'eau qui y existent. Dans un deuxième temps, je reviendrai sur la façon dont j'ai construit mon accès à la rivière, en évoquant les obstacles qui ont entravé l'entrée dans la zone d'étude et les rencontres qui m'ont permis de les franchir. La présentation des interlocuteurs et de quelques « situations de terrain »[3] (Agier, 2009) serviront à mettre en lumière le fonctionnement des relations entre groupes d'usagers, qui permettent de créer des conditions favorables à l'accès à l'eau (espaces d'échanges, dialogues, structuration d'un groupe d'usagers, financement commun d'infrastructures, etc.). C'est à travers les comptes rendus de deux visites de terrain le

1. *L'Incomati, un bassin versant sous influence: coopération transfrontalière, sécurité de l'eau et jeux d'acteurs.* Mémoire de recherche sous la direction de David BLANCHON. Master GEDELO – Université Paris Nanterre.
2. L'écotourisme est considéré ici comme une activité tournée vers l'exportation en raison de la proportion considérable de la clientèle internationale.
3. Pour Michel Agier (2009, p. 58-61), les situations servent à comprendre la relation entre individu, espace et société et constituent une unité d'analyse ethnographique.

long de la Sabie – la première depuis l'intérieur du parc et la deuxième à l'extérieur du Kruger –, que surgira une myriade d'acteurs, dont certains ne font pas partie du paysage institutionnel et qui, pourtant, nous le verrons, jouent un rôle important dans l'accès à l'eau.

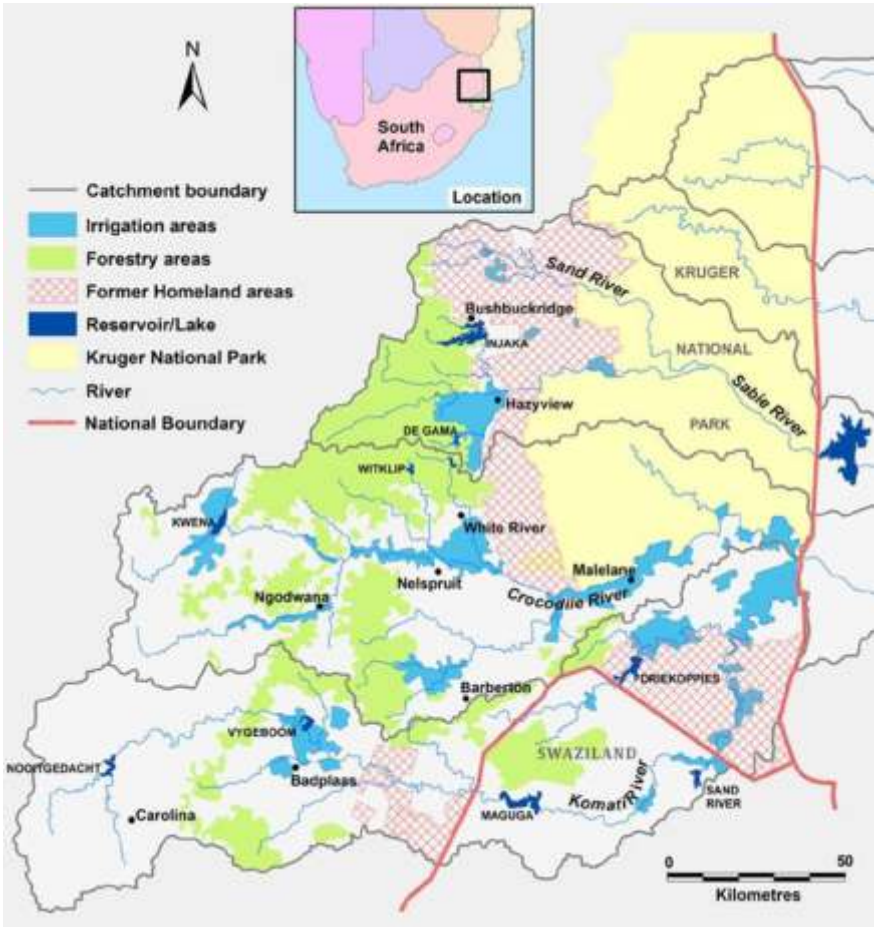
Nous nous plaçons ici dans la perspective décrite par Meissner et Jacobs, considérant que « le rôle de l'individu et d'un nombre croissant de groupes d'intérêt ajoutent une couche de gouvernance supplémentaire à l'origine d'événements anodins aux implications puissantes. Ce sont en effet les acteurs non étatiques et en particulier les individus qui contribuent, avec les États, à élaborer et refaçonner les politiques de l'eau » (Meissner et Jacobs, 2016).

Les eaux de la Sabie, entre exploitation et conservation : des usages contradictoires et un accès toujours inégal

Contexte géographique et principaux usages de l'eau

La *Sabie river* s'écoule sur 230 kilomètres depuis le nord-est de l'Afrique du Sud jusqu'au Mozambique, où se situe sa confluence avec le fleuve Incomati. Près de 90 % du bassin hydrographique de la Sabie est situé en république sud-africaine, où le cours d'eau est marqué par une présence intense d'acteurs locaux très divers et par des usages multiples des ressources foncières, aquatiques (Rogers 2006), biologiques et minérales[4]. La sylviculture occupe une place prépondérante dans la partie amont de la rivière où l'on observe par ailleurs des activités minières légales et illégales. L'aval est, quant à lui, dédié à des activités *a priori* incompatibles. Les activités de loisir et de tourisme écologique basées sur les atouts naturels et le caractère sauvage de la rivière entrent en effet en compétition avec les besoins élémentaires en eau des habitants des zones urbaines et rurales densément peuplées (notamment autour d'Hazyview), ainsi qu'avec les nécessités de l'agriculture vivrière et commerciale (plantations de fruits exotiques, d'avocats, d'agrumes et de noix de macadamia). Une importante proportion des espaces riverains de la Sabie fait l'objet de politiques de conservation, comme en témoigne la présence d'aires protégées dont le *Kruger National Park*, que la Sabie traverse sur 110 kilomètres.

Symbole de biodiversité en Afrique du Sud, le cours d'eau constitue en outre un réservoir hydrologique stratégique au Mozambique, où il est capté dès sa sortie du



Carte 1 : Usage des sols dans le bassin de l'Incomati et anciennes frontières des bantoustans. (Brown, 2014)

4. Les ressources minérales, telles que le sable, sont exploitées dans le lit de la Sabie en aval d'Hazyview.

parc Kruger au barrage de Corumana (représenté en bleu foncé sur la carte 1, à l'est de la frontière entre Afrique du Sud et Mozambique), pour assurer l'irrigation d'exploitations de canne à sucre ainsi que pour l'approvisionnement en eau potable de la ville de Maputo.

La zone sur laquelle nous nous allons nous concentrer ici est la bande de terre comprise entre Hazyview et Skukuza, là où la *Sabie river* sert de démarcation entre les terres communales de l'ancien bantoustan[5] de Gazankulu et l'aire protégée du *Kruger National Park*. Avant d'évoquer les particularités de l'accès à l'eau dans cet espace spécifique, nous proposons d'analyser les principaux enjeux de l'accès à la ressource hydrique dans le bassin versant de la Sabie.

Les spécificités de l'accès à l'eau de la Sabie river

Depuis 2006, la régulation des usages de l'eau et de l'accès est assurée par une agence de bassin, l'*Inkomati Usuthu Catchment Management Agency* (IUCMA), dont l'une des principales fonctions est de délivrer les « permis d'eau » (*water use license*) et d'assurer un équilibre entre les différents usages[6]. L'accès aux ressources hydriques dépend encore largement de l'héritage historique des politiques discriminatoires et de l'empreinte de l'apartheid dans la planification territoriale (Denby et al. 2017). Les terres fertiles de la vallée de la Sabie (cf. le large périmètre irrigué à l'ouest d'Hayview, représenté sur la carte 1) ont été distribuées aux vétérans de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, avec un système d'irrigation gravitaire (un canal) bâti par des prisonniers de guerre. Ces terres ont ensuite été divisées et vendues, et les actuels agriculteurs commerciaux jouissent encore de droits d'eau importants, garantis par la persistance de droits issus de l'ancien régime.

L'allocation des espaces riverains situés entre Hazyview et *Paul Kruger's Gate* (l'une des entrées principales du parc menant à son village principal, Skukuza) relève de l'ingénierie territoriale du « Grand Apartheid[7] » à l'origine de la création de deux bantoustans, où les populations noires ont été déplacées dans les années 1960. Entre les portes d'entrée Phabeni et Kruger, la *Sabie river* marque ainsi la frontière entre le parc national et les espaces ruraux des anciens bantoustans de KaNgwane et Gazankulu (voir carte 2).

Carte 2 : Localisation de la zone d'étude entre les portes de Phabeni et Paul Kruger. (Bushbuckridge Master Plan, 2013)

5. Les bantoustans ou *homelands* sont définis par Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch comme des « territoires en archipel, fragmentés, sans ressources majeures [...] conçus comme de nouvelles nations, devant accéder à l'indépendance ». Leur établissement procède d'un « programme d'ingénierie sociale » ou « grand apartheid » divisant, l'espace national entre zones blanches et bantoustans réservés à chaque ethnie » et [...] déniant à la majorité des Africains leur citoyenneté sud-africaine et expulsant par la force plus de 3,5 millions de personnes de zones dites blanches vers leur soi-disant patrie ethnique (homeland) ». « Dix bantoustans ont ainsi été proclamés : Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatsana, Venda, KwaZulu, Gazankulu, KwaNdebele, QwaQwa, Lebowa, KaNgwane ». (Houssay-Holzschuch et al., 2017).
6. Pour une analyse du processus de création de cette institution et l'influence des politiques de ségrégation spatiales dans son fonctionnement, voir Denby et al. 2017. Les auteurs y étudient notamment comment cette institution transforme l'accès à l'eau des agriculteurs noirs dans le district de Nkomazi, au sud du *Kruger National Park*.
7. « L'apartheid qui signifiait "développement séparé des races" en afrikaans [...] était avant tout une pratique de gouvernement qui a systématisé les principes ségrégatifs hérités de la période coloniale. L'apartheid reposait sur une normalisation et une hiérarchisation stricte de catégories raciales et sur un ensemble de techniques spatiales de gouvernement et de domination. Il est en fait possible de distinguer trois apartheids différents et en partie successifs. L'"apartheid mesquin" [...] régissait l'usage séparé des espaces publics et même des espaces domestiques ainsi que les relations sociales entre groupes hiérarchisés. [...] L'"apartheid résidentiel" – ou apartheid urbain – cantonnait, cette fois à l'échelle des agglomérations, les différents groupes raciaux dans des zones bien délimitées, les townships des Noirs, Métis et Indiens étant même séparés de la véritable cité (au sens municipal), celle du centre-ville et des quartiers blancs, par une zone tampon. Le "grand apartheid" [...] visait à établir une certaine décolonisation interne en accordant l'indépendance aux fameux bantoustans formés de terres discontinues et totalement dépendants économiquement, et à se débarrasser ainsi du problème politique des droits civiques et politiques de la majorité de la population devenue pseudo-citoyenne de ces pseudo-États. » (Giraut, 2009).

Cette configuration spatiale constitue une spécificité et revêt d'importants enjeux du point de vue de l'accès à la rivière et à ses ressources. Dans une étude réalisée en 2012, Regourd a entre autres choses étudié la question de l'accès à l'eau dans ces espaces ruraux, et note le fait suivant :

> « *[B]lack farmers who are in drier areas, on more sandy soils and who do not always have access to water despite the existence of irrigated schemes, are unable to organise themselves and are dependent on social grants and incomes from migrant labour.* [...] *[A]lthough farmers downstream of the Sabie River Valley have seen their situation improve since the extension of the irrigated area in 2005, the water quantities available are far from sufficient and the lack of well-defined water rights limits the area under cultivation and slows down the agricultural development if this area.* [...] *Although the river ecosystem is fragile and the downstream farmers could theoretically pump water, security issues such as pump theft and the current high cost of energy deprives them of it.*"(Regourd 2012)

Nous allons maintenant nous concentrer sur l'accès à l'eau de la Sabie dans cette zone d'interface entre le *Kruger National Park* et les espaces ruraux des anciens bantoustans. Si la *Sabie river* concentre, le long de ces espaces riverains, une diversité d'acteurs et d'usages de ses ressources hydriques, comment s'articule cette variété ? Existe-t-il des conflits ou des alliances dans la gestion de l'eau qui guident, influencent ou orientent les choix et les possibilités d'accès à cette ressource ? Nous avons choisi d'appréhender ces questions de recherche depuis le *Kruger National Park*, qui a constitué notre principal point d'entrée sur la rivière et ses usagers. En effet, il s'agit d'un des principaux usagers de la *Sabie river*, du fait de son positionnement géographique stratégique et de son influence en tant qu'acteur politique, économique et scientifique. L'octroi d'un accord de recherche par les autorités du Kruger pour 2019-2020 nous a offert l'avantage de bénéficier de leur appui logistique et scientifique, ainsi que d'un accès privilégié aux données (géographiques, biologiques, stratégiques...) et aux réseaux d'acteurs. Le parc constitue en outre un point d'observation privilégié des interactions entre les différents groupes d'usagers des ressources hydriques, le long de la *Sabie river*. Toutefois, malgré ces circonstances favorables, j'ai rencontré plusieurs obstacles pour accéder à la zone d'étude.

Contourner les barrières pour parvenir au terrain

L'accès aux espaces cultivés entre Hazyview et Paul Kruger's Gate a en effet été rendu difficile par plusieurs facteurs : l'insécurité, des routes peu praticables et, *a priori*, l'absence d'intermédiaire pour m'introduire auprès des habitants. En mai 2019, à l'occasion de mon deuxième séjour de recherche, j'ai eu l'occasion d'en prendre conscience de façon concrète. Dans un premier temps, ma découverte de la zone s'est faite depuis la route principale, la R536, reliant Hazyview au *Paul Kruger's Gate*. De la route, la rivière est peu visible : les clôtures des réserves privées, les façades d'hôtels, de résidences touristiques et d'exploitations agricoles en masquent la vue dans les quelques endroits où la route s'en rapproche. Dans l'un de ces rares points où la vue est dégagée, il m'a été possible d'observer qu'une clôture était installée entre terres agricoles et rivière, clôture qui semble se prolonger bien au-delà de ces exploitations.

L'existence de routes secondaires permet certes de se rapprocher du cours d'eau, mais les histoires relayées dans la presse et les avertissements de plusieurs habitants à propos de l'insécurité m'ont dissuadé de les emprunter. En outre, comme je l'ai découvert plus tard, un véhicule adapté (4x4) est nécessaire pour parcourir cet espace, et je n'en disposais pas.

Aussi ai-je d'abord suivi le cours de la rivière-frontière depuis l'intérieur du *Kruger National Park*, sur la rive sud. Toutefois, depuis ce point d'observation, il ne m'était pas possible de bien observer l'autre rive. J'y distinguais bien une clôture, et parfois des constructions hôtelières et des terres cultivées ; en revanche, l'interdiction de sortir du véhicule dans le parc et le faible nombre de points d'observation dégagés de végétation m'empêchaient d'observer avec précision.

C'est à la fin juin 2019, alors que mon séjour prenait fin, que j'ai enfin pu pénétrer cette zone et que ma compréhension des dynamiques d'accès à l'eau a véritablement débuté. Comme on le verra, je reviendrai

Photographie 1 : La Sabie river vue du parc national Kruger en juin 2019. On entrevoit au loin une clôture et des arbres fruitiers. © Nicolas Verhaeghe

sur trois situations de terrain qui m'ont permis d'affiner mon appréhension des usages et des groupes d'usagers de l'eau, et des implications qui en découlent. Avec la première situation de départ, une visite d'une exploitation agricole, je reviendrai sur ma découverte d'un élément fondamental et déterminant pour l'accès à l'irrigation pour les agriculteurs. Les deux situations suivantes, vécues à une semaine d'intervalle, permettront de présenter le contraste entre les enjeux et les macrodynamiques d'accès à l'eau observés depuis l'intérieur du parc, à travers la perspective d'un usager unique (les autorités du parc) et les dynamiques microsociales qui se jouent depuis l'extérieur du parc pour des usagers multiples.

Situation de départ : La découverte des portes d'accès à la rivière pour l'irrigation

C'est fin juin 2019, à l'issue de mon deuxième séjour de recherche, que j'ai pu visiter l'exploitation de Danny. Boris, un jeune homme qui travaille au camp de touristes de Skukuza et avec qui j'avais sympathisé, m'a présenté à Danny. Boris s'est intéressé à mon travail, me voyant souvent installé devant mon ordinateur au restaurant afin de profiter du point d'accès à internet. Comme il habite Mkhuhlu et qu'il connait bien la rivière et ses riverains, je lui avais demandé si des personnes de son entourage étaient des usagers réguliers du cours d'eau. Il m'a donc proposé de rencontrer Danny, une personne chère à ses yeux, qui dirige une exploitation agricole sur la rive nord de la Sabie. Nous nous sommes donné rendez-vous à l'occasion de l'un de ses jours de congés pour qu'il m'accompagne jusqu'à l'atelier mécanique (l'autre activité) de Danny, à Cork. Ancien militaire, Danny s'est vu attribuer à sa retraite une terre par le chef traditionnel, cette terre faisant partie du périmètre irrigué d'Hoxani. Son beau-frère, Richard, s'occupe de l'exploitation. Notre entretien a à peine débuté que Danny commence à m'expliquer les difficultés auxquelles lui et les autres agriculteurs sont confrontés, et qui ne leur permettent pas d'utiliser leurs droits d'eau :

> « *We as farmers, we do have many farms; due to some problems of pumping engines, we don't use the water, then the percent that we suppose to utilise, we don't reach, it's only 30% what we are using.* »

Je lui demande si l'accès est organisé avec les autres agriculteurs membres du périmètre irrigué ; il me répond que chacun dispose d'un permis et de pompes installées à l'intérieur du parc, auxquelles ils accèdent par des portes :

> « *We got many gates this side, where you can walk towards the river and you pump the water there* [...] *It's open, the boundary is the river, it's the Sabie river, we are not allowed to cross the river, but from the other side of the river, we walk towards the river no problem, Park they give us that authority.* »

Je l'interroge ensuite sur la technique d'irrigation qu'il utilise, et il m'indique qu'il fait usage d'une pompe individuelle, achetée trois ans auparavant, à la suite de l'échec d'un programme public de pompes électriques installées pour les douze agriculteurs du périmètre irrigué. Faute d'argent public permettant de les entretenir, les pompes sont peu à peu tombées en panne, entraînant l'abandon de la moitié des exploitations agricoles.

> « *The electric pump, that broken and they didn't repair it again because it was so expensive for them, it was done by government, then they don't have any NGO.*[...] *that pump was supplying twelve farms.*[...] *But now the twelve farms, maybe, not even half are active.* »

En compagnie de Richard, nous nous rendons ensuite sur l'exploitation, où une femme d'une soixantaine

Photographies 2 et 3 : Portail d'accès à la Sabie river (gauche) et pompe pour irriguer (à droite), juin 2019. © Nicolas Verhaeghe

d'années nous ouvre la porte d'accès à la rivière. Richard me montre le moteur diesel qu'il utilise pour pomper l'eau, m'indiquant que cela lui coûte presque 300 rands par jour (environ 20 euros). Je leur demande si d'autres habitants utilisent cette porte pour entrer dans le parc et Boris me traduit ce que lui répond Richard en langue tsonga.

> « *Usually they lock the gate so… only he* [Danny] *has the power to let people in, either the workers or him, cause he has the key to the gates.* »

Nous rejoignons ensuite Danny à son atelier et je le remercie pour cette découverte sur les portes d'accès, Danny reprécise alors :

> « *And those gates, every farm got that gate* […]. *Once you got a farm, you got a license for… entering through the gate.* »

Avant de partir, Danny me donne le contact de Charles, qu'il appelle un « *middle man* », et qui coordonne quatre coopératives agricoles ; il me précise que cet homme « connaît tout et tout le monde ». Je rencontre Charles quelques jours plus tard, à Skukuza. Il a repris depuis 1997 l'exploitation agricole de son grand-père en bordure de la *Sabie river*. Après que j'ai lui ai présenté l'objet de ma recherche, il débute l'entretien en m'expliquant que l'emplacement des clôtures et grillages qui séparent la rivière des villages adjacents a changé : auparavant, la clôture était située sur l'autre rive et l'accès au cours d'eau se faisait ainsi du côté des villages (« *The fence was on the otherside of the Park and the water was on our side.* »). Charles précise qu'elle a été déplacée car le *Kruger National Park* souhaitait avoir une utilisation exclusive de la Sabie. Je l'interroge sur son propre accès à l'eau et il m'indique qu'il possède un système de pompage électrique ; sa facture s'élève à environ 7000 rands par mois (environ 450 euros).

M'étant enquis de l'existence de projets collectifs d'amélioration d'accès à l'eau au niveau des groupements d'agriculteurs, il mentionne un programme de construction d'une canalisation (« *bulk water pipeline to provide water* »). Il parle en réalité du *Sabie river stewardship project*, projet dont j'avais connaissance et que nous évoquerons plus bas (cf. encadré). Sceptique quant à la finalité de ce projet, il craint qu'il ne s'agisse d'une manœuvre pour empêcher les agriculteurs d'entrer dans le parc et précise que, pour le moment, la majorité des agriculteurs cultivant en bordure du parc reçoit l'eau du parc :

> « *We are sourcing water from the river and the river it's inside the park* […]. *We are getting water from the Park now, so that's why if you drive around the farms,*

you'll see that boundary fence. [...] *In each farm there is a gate which allows the farm owner to enter and they do his farm business in there in terms of sourcing water... our pumps are right in the Park, just next to the river.* »

Il conclut en disant que, selon lui, le projet vise à empêcher l'accès des agriculteurs au parc (« *So this idea it's like they want to prevent farmers from entering the Park by getting water outside.* »). À quelques jours de mon départ, Charles me confirmait l'enjeu stratégique que représenteent les portes d'accès pour les agriculteurs dont je présenterai, dans les parties suivantes, le rôle, la gestion et les tensions qu'elles génèrent entre usagers. Presque cinq mois plus tard, j'allais pouvoir explorer de plus près ces aspects au cours d'une nouvelle période d'enquête.

Situation 1 : Observer les macrodynamiques d'accès à l'eau et les usages de la rivière depuis l'intérieur du Parc

À mon retour en Afrique du Sud pour un troisième séjour de recherche en octobre 2019, Kiera, ma référente à SANParks[8], me propose de me joindre à une sortie terrain. Elle a en effet décidé d'accompagner un professeur et une étudiante de l'université de Witwatersrand, venus effectuer des mesures de qualité de l'eau de la Sabie, une de leurs zones d'étude pour tester de nouvelles méthodes d'analyse.

Pour rejoindre l'un des deux sites d'échantillonnage, nous empruntons la route en terre, la *Sabie river road*, qui longe le cours d'eau. Depuis cette route, la Sabie constitue la frontière entre le parc et les villages voisins. Pendant le trajet en voiture, Kiera indique qu'elle a effectué l'intégralité de cette route à pied l'année précédente, en quatre jours, en vue de cartographier les points d'extraction d'eau (pompes d'irrigation) depuis l'autre rive. Elle précise que ses équipes avaient préalablement identifié ces points, ainsi que les infrastructures installées à proximité de la Sabie depuis l'extérieur du parc, et qu'il s'agissait donc pour elle d'une visite de vérification. Elle a ainsi identifié quelques nouveaux points de pompage et en a profité pour cartographier les zones de pêche évidentes, là où des filets avaient été installés dans la rivière. Je lui demande si, au cours de sa marche, elle avait constaté une importante fréquentation de la rivière : elle signale la venue régulière à la rivière des habitantes de Belfast et de Cork pour nettoyer leur linge.

Quelques jours plus tard, je souhaite en savoir advantage sur le contexte dans lequel s'inscrivait ce travail de cartographie des usages de l'eau par les populations riveraines. Kiera precise alors:

« *It was basically part of our status-quo assessment of our WWF Sabie project* [...] *basically trying to map out all the farming areas* [...]. *It actually starts way back, about four years ago when, as you know we've got a poaching problem in the Park, and so the security personnel started to just query the rights to access into the Sabie river.* [...] *At the same time the Department of agriculture was upgrading the veterinary fence along the Sabie river, that's where I started to interact with the Khomanani forum.*[...] *So basically that mapping was to verify the extent of lawful entries into the Park, boundaries for irrigation use, so that's why we did the mapping, just to go and document all the pumping points so that they can be documented and also that they could be provided to the Rangers and the veterinary services so that they knew where they would have to put in new pedestrian gates for irrigation access.* »

Cet exercice d'identification et de cartographie des usages répondait ainsi à différents enjeux (sécurité sanitaire, sécurité et lutte contre le braconnage et protection des milieux aquatiques), impliquant plusieurs services et équipes qui avaient un mot à dire sur l'installation de « portes piétonnes » (*pedestrian gates*) pour accéder à l'eau, notamment pour l'irrigation. En outre, les données recueillies ont servi de base au montage d'un projet plus large : le *Sabie River Water Stewardship Project* dont j'avais déjà tenté de suivre le déroulement au cours d'une mission précédente, entre mai et juillet 2019.

8. South African National Parks, organisation parapublique qui administre les parcs nationaux sud-africains.

Sabie River Water Stewardship Project

Le projet provient des échanges entre les agriculteurs cultivant le long de la *Sabie river*, en lisière du parc Kruger, qui souhaitaient trouver une solution collective pour remédier à leur faible accès à l'eau. Ayant proposé à SANParks de les soutenir dans cette démarche, ce dernier a monté un projet auprès du WWF Nedbank Green Trust. Il est piloté par SANParks (*Kruger National Park*) et administré par Kruger 2 Canyon Biosphere Region Non Profit Company[9] et vise à faciliter l'accès à l'eau d'irrigation à partir de la *Sabie river* pour quatre périmètres irrigués.

L'objectif de SANParks est également de mieux maîtriser les usages en lisière du parc afin de préserver la Sabie (ainsi le projet entend-il favoriser des pratiques agro-écologiques) et d'en faire une zone tampon. Le projet souhaite également créer un rapprochement entre usagers « commerciaux » (agriculteurs commerciaux et entreprises sylvicoles) et usagers « émergents » à l'échelle du bassin versant de la Sabie. Pour ce faire, le projet prévoit de créer une plateforme de discussions et d'échanges pour une meilleure coordination des efforts de lutte contre les plantes invasives (qui captent une importante quantité d'eau), afin de libérer des volumes d'eau emprisonnés en amont pour les réallouer en aval. Pour ce volet, il s'agirait de travailler avec le *Department of Environmental Affairs*[10] et faire en sorte que le programme « *Working for Water* » soit mieux coordonné et plus efficace dans le traitement de ces plantes invasives. L'un des principaux enjeux du projet est d'accompagner les coopératives dans une meilleure gestion de l'eau, par des formations et l'utilisation d'outils technologiques, mais également de garantir des droits d'eau, notamment pour l'un des périmètres irrigués n'en bénéficiant pas jusqu'alors (Goromane). Enfin, le projet doit permettre de structurer l'organisation collective des quatre coopératives (Khomanani Forum)[11].

Lors du suivi de ce projet que j'ai effectué entre mai et juillet 2019, les agriculteurs avaient également proposé la construction d'une infrastructure d'irrigation : il était question d'une canalisation de 30 kilomètres entre Hazyview et Belfast, qui transporterait l'eau par gravité vers les terres des agriculteurs des quatre périmètres. Au moment de mon départ, des discussions étaient en cours en vue de monter un pré-projet et de le promouvoir auprès des institutions publiques pour l'éventuel financement de cette infrastructure. Toutefois, à mon retour en Afrique du Sud en octobre, le projet avait été suspendu pour des raisons « politiques », sans autre explication.

Le *Sabie River Water Stewardship Project* constitue le premier véritable projet inaugurant une nouvelle politique d'ouverture du *Kruger National Park* vers les populations riveraines, et formalisée dans la nouvelle stratégie du parc[12]. Selon Kiera, c'est le prolongement d'une politique débutée en 2008 par le gouvernement sud-africain et qui appelait à un mouvement d'ouverture des parcs nationaux vers les populations riveraines, avec la volonté que les « *natural assets* » leur bénéficient davantage.

Alors que nous poursuivons notre route, Kiera désigne des terres sur l'autre rive, et notamment une exploitation de 300 hectares abandonnée. Elle précise que, bien qu'elle dispose de droits d'eau, personne ne les utilise alors qu'ils sont convoités et risquent d'être retirés. Elle explique aussi que la sauvegarde de ces droits est l'une des raisons pour lesquelles le *Sabie River Water Stewardship Project* a été monté :

9. Établie en 2011, l'organisation coordonne les activités de conservation de la biodiversité et des héritages culturels dans la réserve de biosphère Kruger to Canyon, zone de près de 2,5 millions d'hectares à cheval entre les provinces du Limpopo et du Mpumalanga et qui comprend notamment le parc Kruger et le Blyde river Canyon. Les réserves de biosphère dépendent du programme « Man and biosphere » de l'UNESCO qui en ratifie la reconnaissance sur proposition des Etats.
10. Rebaptisé Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) en juin 2019.
11. Pour une présentation du projet, voir l'article sur le site bizcommunity : https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/643/187491.html
12. Kruger National Park Management Plan for the period 2018-2028.

« *I mean that was one of the reasons why we set up the Sabie Stewardship Project was to basically try and get investment back in so that these areas can be productive again, there's enough water in the system.* [...] *That farm has water rights but it's not been utilised at the moment, people call me to ask about it, cause the people are looking for those water rights, that's what I keep on telling these farmers: "If you don't start using it soon, it's gonna be taken away".* »

Elle souligne également que l'un des objectifs du projet est de maintenir une activité économique dans ces exploitations agricoles à la limite (la *Sabie river*) du *Kruger National Park* et que cela garantirait le maintien de ces droits d'eau, tout en permettant au parc de bénéficier de ces volumes supplémentaires :

« [...] *And what I wanna do is keep them coming down here for an economic good because it still flows 40 kilometers along the Kruger Park boundary, so it's still having an ecosystem service role, I mean we have the reserve implemented pretty well but a little bit of extra water would be good.* »

Ainsi, en étudiant ce projet visant au maintien des droits (voire à la création de nouvelles allocations) pour les riverains du parc, on peut saisir à quel point l'eau constitue un enjeu stratégique majeur. En effet, ces droits sont convoités et risquent d'être redistribués, alors même que la réforme des allocations en eau est en cours dans le bassin de l'Incomati. En tant qu'usager le plus en aval de la *Sabie river* en Afrique du Sud, le parc semble vouloir anticiper les éventuels effets de cette réforme en s'alliant avec d'autres usagers, afin de garantir que ce cours d'eau stratégique soit préservé autant que possible. C'est dans cet esprit que Kiera se réjouit auprès du professeur que les autorités mozambicaines prennent de plus en plus conscience de l'importance de la qualité de l'eau, et notamment de l'importance stratégique de la Sabie, ce qui en fait un allié supplémentaire.

Au cours de cette situation de terrain, je me suis retrouvé confronté à un seul usager de la *Sabie river*, le *Kruger National Park*, et aux macro-enjeux liés à l'accès à l'eau à grande échelle. Dans la situation suivante, nous verrons comment l'accès à l'eau est vécu depuis l'autre rive, à travers de l'analyse des microdynamiques locales.

Situation 2 : Observer les microdynamiques d'accès à l'eau depuis l'extérieur du parc

Une semaine plus tard, alors que je venais approfondir auprès de Kiera différents éléments évoqués lors de notre visite, nous sommes revenus sur la question des portes d'accès à la rivière dont je souhaitais mieux connaître le fonctionnement. J'ai appris tout d'abord que la clôture constitue une « *disease control fence* », ne relevant pas de l'autorité de SANParks et visant à protéger les élevages industriels et domestiques contre les maladies en provenance de la faune du parc (notamment les buffles). Concernant la gestion des portes, elle m'indique qu'il n'existe pas de système formel et me conseille d'aller interroger Laura et Henry, employés du ministère en charge de l'agriculture (*Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development*, DALRRD) dont les services sont responsables de la maintenance de ces portes d'accès à la rivière.

Quelques jours plus tard, alors que j'étais venu fixer un rendez-vous pour un entretien avec elle, Laura me reçoit avec enthousiasme dans son bureau et m'accorde de son temps de façon inopinée. Par une heureuse coïncidence, elle me présente ensuite son collègue Henry, qui a prévu pour les deux journées suivantes une inspection de la clôture vétérinaire et des portes d'accès le long de la *Sabie river*.

Très loquace, Laura précise d'emblée que son service n'a pas la compétence de contrôler l'accès au Kruger et que la décision de laisser des usagers pénétrer dans le parc relève de SANParks. Elle me renseigne sur la gestion des portes d'accès à la rivière, confirmant qu'il n'existe pas de système formel :

« *When we get a request for a gate on our fence, then we always pass on to SANParks, because the moment there's a gate, obviously there's a request for access which I cannot give* [...] *If they're happy then we consider if we should*

pay for the gate or the owner pays for the gate, usually the owner would have to pay for it but [...] *we often build the gate for free because* [...] *it's for the better, but we still have to go with SANParks, again not in a formalised process but through emails to the right people*. »

J'apprends qu'une clôture vétérinaire est installée depuis les années 1960 tout autour du parc, pour éviter la propagation d'épizooties en provenance de la faune sauvage (notamment la *foot and mouth disease*) dans les troupeaux d'animaux domestiques. Dans certaines configurations où des cours d'eau constituent les limites du parc – comme c'est le cas pour la Sabie –, des portes d'accès ont été installées au sein de la clôture, ce qui permet aux riverains d'accéder à la rivière pour leurs besoins spécifiques (souvent l'irrigation) et de garantir l'usage de leurs droits d'eau. Le prélèvement de toute autre ressource est prohibé et considéré comme du braconnage, et le fait de franchir les barrières comme une violation du territoire du parc.

Le long de la Sabie, une cinquantaine de portes ont ainsi été ouvertes dans la clôture, la majorité de ces portes étant réservées aux agriculteurs pour leur permettre une installation et une maintenance aisée de leurs pompes. Quelques portes (4 ou 5) permettent en outre aux habitants des villages riverains d'accéder à la rivière pour des usages domestiques. Laura résume le paradoxe que représente la gestion de ces portes :

« *The fence and the access [are] a problem because we try to get the people to stay out of the Park without taking away their right to the water, because that's not something* [...] *we control as the Department of Agriculture fence, it's not our mandate, so if SANParks says: "they're supposed to have access", I must actually build a gate for them because my fence is only there for buffaloes* ».

Au cours de récents travaux de remplacement des clôtures électrifiées, de nombreuses portes d'accès ont été condamnées. Interrogée sur la façon dont est prise la décision de les maintenir ou de les supprimer, Laura indique que cela repose sur l'évaluation de leur usage par son service, à savoir si le chemin autour de la porte paraît fréquenté ou non. La décision repose également sur la présence éventuelle de pompes d'irrigation :

« *I can not prevent the guy from accessing his pump, if there's a pump there, we leave the gate, if there's no pump there, we're closing the fence quickly. So with the new fence we build, and you will see the new cables of fence, we removed quite a lot of gates actually*. »

Consciente des raisons pratiques pour lesquelles les pompes d'irrigation sont installées à l'intérieur du parc, à proximité de la Sabie, elle explique que les agriculteurs peuvent ainsi pomper à moindre coût l'eau de la rivière car, plus la pompe est proche du cours d'eau, moins d'énergie sera nécessaire. Cela implique pour le ministère de l'Agriculture de garantir un accès physique des agriculteurs à la rivière qui se retrouve, du fait de l'installation de la clôture vétérinaire, à l'intérieur du parc.

Ce système de portes semble toutefois poser problème au ministère de l'Agriculture comme aux services de sécurité du parc Kruger. Les portes d'accès restent souvent ouvertes, ce qui peut constituer un point de sortie pour la faune sauvage, ou un point d'entrée pour les animaux domestiques ou d'autres habitants riverains. Régulièrement, des troupeaux domestiques venus s'abreuver se retrouvent piégés à l'intérieur du parc, les bêtes étant relativement peu gardées et se déplaçant assez librement. Considéré comme illégal, cet usage est toutefois toléré par les services du ministère de l'Agriculture, surtout en période de sécheresse où peu de points d'eau alternatifs sont accessibles dans la zone. Ainsi, lors de ma visite avec Henry, nous avons fait sortir du parc un troupeau qui y était resté bloqué – phénomène quotidien en période estivale.

En mouvement inverse, des éléphants franchissent régulièrement la barrière par les portes d'accès et se retrouvent sur les terres des cultivateurs voisins. Ces portes sont en effet devenues les points faibles de la clôture depuis la récente modification de type de grillage ; elles sont régulièrement franchies par des pachydermes friands des produits cultivés en lisière du parc. Deux éléphants avaient même été tués au cours de la semaine de ma visite, pour être sortis du parc en détruisant des portes d'accès et en dévastant plusieurs cultures. Dans un tel cas de figure, aucun système de dédommagement ne semble exister pour l'agriculteur lésé. Dans l'une des

Photographies 4 et 5 : Un troupeau enfermé à l'intérieur du parc (4) est conduit vers l'extérieur (5), octobre 2019. © Nicolas Verhaeghe

Photographies 6 et 7 : Portes d'accès à la *Sabie river* endommagées par des éléphants, octobre 2019. © Nicolas Verhaeghe

exploitations visitées, ce sont les tuyaux d'irrigation qui avaient été détruits par les éléphants, cette fois-ci à l'intérieur du parc.

Laura résume ces différentes problématiques :

> « *Another problem with the pumping is a lot of people, when we speak to the security guys, the first thing they tell you is "they must move that pump outside the fence" but we say it's not that simple* [...]. *One could consider a well* [...] *outside the fence and you could pump from outside the same water you would have pumped inside* [...] *so you can completely avoid the gate conflict cause the gate cause a zone conflict, more human conflicts than anything else and you also avoid the livestock-alien* [...] *that time of the year for example, you catch cattle inside the Park. That makes the Sabie river quite tricky*. »

Afin de réduire les espaces vulnérables de cette enceinte vétérinaire, le service responsable de sa maintenance tente actuellement de mettre en vigueur de nouvelles règles pour s'assurer notamment que les portes restent fermées. Selon ces futures règles, les cultivateurs devraient financer eux-mêmes les portes d'accès, leur réparation et leur maintenance. Toutefois, dans de nombreux cas décrits par Henry et Laura, ou observés directement, leur service continue de financer et de réparer les portes en proposant l'aide de leurs techniciens. Au moment de la visite d'inspection, Henry informait les populations de son intention de réunir l'ensemble des agriculteurs cultivant le long de la *Sabie river* pour leur exposer ces nouvelles règles. L'autre solution imaginée pour réduire la fragilité de la clôture consiste, pour le ministère de l'Agriculture, à installer des portes plus étroites afin de limiter la possibilité de sorties des éléphants.

Au cours de la visite d'inspection, j'ai également pu observer des usages de la rivière autres que ceux liés à l'irrigation. J'ai notamment découvert que des cérémonies religieuses rassemblant de nombreuses personnes et des rituels pratiqués par des médecins traditionnels se déroulaient à proximité du cours d'eau. En période de sécheresse, les guérisseurs viennent souvent de villages éloignés (parfois de près de 30 kilomètres), la Sabie constituant l'unique rivière avec un

Photographies 8 et 9 : Pour réduire la vulnérabilité de la clôture, la DALRRD a condamné une porte d'accès (8) et installé une porte plus étroite (9), octobre 2019. © Nicolas Verhaeghe

Photographies 10 et 11 : Après avoir franchi les portes d'accès à la Sabie (10), des habitantes lavent leur linge à la rivière et puisent de l'eau pour leurs besoins domestiques (11), octobre 2019. © Nicolas Verhaeghe

débit d'eau suffisant. Outre cet usage, certains habitants y puisent de l'eau pour leurs besoins domestiques, dans des bidons, et en font des stocks domestiques destinés à leurs foyers mal ou pas raccordés à un réseau d'eau potable. Notons que les portes d'accès au parc sont éloignées des villages alentour et que pour les atteindre, il faut traverser la route principale, voire les champs voisins, ce qui crée des risques d'accident et attise de potentiels conflits.

Certains riverains profitent en outre de ces accès pour prélever des ressources devenues rares dans les espaces communaux (bois de chauffage, racines, roseaux, poissons). Avec une clôture qui enferme la rivière à l'intérieur du parc, de nombreux habitants se retrouvent de fait en situation de violation de propriété et risquent ainsi d'être considérés comme des braconniers (*poachers*). La distinction devient vague quant à la qualification des actes délictueux (braconnage réel ? violation de propriété ?) et quant à leur sanction. Ainsi, le flou crée de fortes tensions entre les services de sécurité du parc, les riverains qui y pénètrent pour des usages consentis, pour des besoins de subsistance tolérés mais considérés comme des prélèvements illégaux, et ceux qui y perpétuent des activités considérées comme des délits voire des crimes. Pénétrer dans le parc fait courir un certain nombre de risques aux habitants, qui doivent traverser une route très empruntée et qui peuvent être victimes d'attaques d'animaux sauvages. Or le flou juridique réside également dans la localisation même de la limite grillagée, et certains habitants corroborent la version rapportée plus haut par Charles, considérant que la clôture devrait être sur l'autre rive. Un jeune homme venu puiser de l'eau explique à Henry, qui m'a traduit son propos :

> « *This river belongs to the community, the Park requested that this fence it will be this side just to allow the animals to also have an access here, otherwise if the fence was that other side then the animals won't be getting water but actually this fence shouldn't be here, it should be on that other side of the river, that's why now there are gates and people are being allowed to access the river*. »

L'installation de la clôture sur les berges de la rive nord de la Sabie a de nombreuses conséquences. Du côté du Kruger, elle permet de maintenir l'accès la rivière de la faune sauvage et offre un panorama unique sur la rivière,

tout en accroissant de façon importante la superficie du parc. Le grillage a en effet été posé sur les berges à quelques centaines de mètres du cours d'eau, ce qui éloigne encore plus la rivière des terres cultivées et des villages voisins. Cette clôture, outre son objectif de protection sanitaire, permet également de filtrer et de contrôler l'accès au territoire du parc le long de la *Sabie river*, en le limitant à une cinquantaine de portes. Avec la récente explosion du trafic international (notamment de cornes de rhinocéros) perpétré par des organisations criminelles, le contrôle des intrusions dans le parc se durcit encore. Les enjeux de contrôle du risque sanitaire par la limitation des mouvements et de la circulation des populations et des troupeaux, et surtout de leur entrée dans le Kruger, se combinent ainsi désormais aux enjeux liés au contrôle du territoire par les services de sécurité du parc. Il en ressort une contradiction évidente avec l'objectif d'ouverture vers les communautés voisines, promu récemment par le *Kruger National Park*. Devant cette situation complexe, les autorités gestionnaires et les services chargés du contrôle de la clôture vétérinaire voient d'un bon œil la création de résidences hôtelières ou de réserves privées, qui permettent de limiter les mouvements dans un espace difficile à contrôler. Les propos croisés de Laura et de Kiera illustrent cette assertion. Pour Laura, les nouvelles constructions lui facilitent le travail en créant une zone tampon supplémentaire, dans laquelle elle sait que les troupeaux ne se rendront pas :

> « *This road from Kruger Gate to Hazyview, which is parallel to the Sabie river basically most of the way, so south of that road you've got new developments* [...]. *In a way, I don't actually mind them because to me that puts an extra buffer where we know livestock is not gonna move, but from a water extraction point of view I presume it's gonna be bad because there's actually places that need a lot of water* [...]. »

La mise en parallèle de ces propos avec ceux de Kiera permettent d'illustrer la tendance à la conversion des terres agricoles que facilitent les accords autorisant un zonage au sein du parc Kruger :

> « *This is also Traditional Council land, that's been sold off at developers, by the Chief* [...] *for quite a long-term leases* [...]. *They want to zone themselves into the Park, cause that land is zoned agricultural land, not conservation land, or protected environment, so... then if you get zoned into a Park, there's a whole other things have to happen, you have to get contractual arrangements with the Kruger, cause we then become the conservation management authority* [...] *so we often get requests from the developers to do that. But there's a lot of developpment of that land to tourist land, or lodges.* »

La conversion des terres agricoles vers l'écotourisme ou leur intégration dans une zone de conservation se combinent avec le risque de retrait de droits d'eau décrit plus haut. Une terre non utilisée pourrait ainsi être vendue et ses droits d'eau retirés, ce qui représente un risque de réduction de l'accès à la *Sabie river*. Un nombre important de terres agricoles ne sont pas exploitées et, leurs droits d'eau ne sont pas forcément utilisés, en raison notamment du coût élevé de l'énergie nécessaire à pomper cette eau. En outre, l'accès à l'eau d'irrigation pour les cultivateurs vivant en lisière du Kruger dépend de l'installation de pompes situées à l'intérieur du parc. Il implique le franchissement des grilles d'enceinte et la pénétration dans ce qui est considéré comme le territoire du parc. Si le système de création et de maintenance des portes autorise une certaine souplesse, et une assistance fréquente du ministère de l'Agriculture aux agriculteurs, il semble paradoxalement renforcer la fragilité de l'accès à l'eau. Les agriculteurs voisins du parc font dès lors face à de nombreuses difficultés, et notamment à l'absence de sécurité foncière, l'attribution des terres relevant de chefs tribaux considérés comme « *government of land* », et dont certaines peuvent être converties vers d'autres usages. Qu'adviendrait-il si des terres ne sont pas cultivées pendant quelques années ? Les portes seraient-elles condamnées ? La pression foncière pourrait-elle amener à une conversion de ces terres décidée par ceux auxquels elles appartiennent, c'est-à-dire les chefs tribaux ? Qu'en est-il aussi de l'avis des occupants s'ils désirent, eux-mêmes ou leurs enfants, les cultiver des années après ?

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Fishermen at the top of Massingir dam, Gaza Province, Mozambique, August 2018 © Paul-Malo Winsback

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